TechLife NEWS

Jan 20, 2024

VISION PRO HANDS ON

EXPERIENCING HEADSET DEMOS IN APPLE STORE

FREE SPEECH & INCLUSIVITY

TENSION ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES SIMMERS

Baristas & Chefs

ROBOTS CAUSED A STIR AT CES 2024 AS WORKERS FEAR FOR THEIR JOBS

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A fashion week is a fashion industry event, lasting approximately one week, where fashion designers, brands or "houses" display their latest collections in runway fashion shows to buyers and the media. These events influence trends for the current and upcoming seasons. The most prominent fashion weeks are held in the fashion capitals of the world; New York, London, Milan, and Paris, or the "Big Four" which receive the majority of press coverage.

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SAMSUNG
SAMSUNG

SAMSUNG VIES TO MAKE AI MORE MAINSTREAM BY BAKING MORE OF THE TECHNOLOGY INTO ITS GALAXY PHONES

6:22
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Smartphones could get much smarter this year as the next wave of artificial intelligence seeps into the devices that accompany people almost everywhere they go.

Samsung, the biggest rival to Apple and its iPhone, provided a glimpse of how smartphones are evolving during a Wednesday unveiling of the next generation of its flagship Galaxy models.

The sales pitch for the Galaxy S24 lineup revolves around an array of new features powered by AI.

“We will reshape the technology landscape, we will open a new chapter without barriers to unleash your potential,” TM Roh, the president of Samsung’s mobile experience division, vowed to a crowd gathered in a San Jose, California, arena usually used for hockey games and concerts.

Besides featuring some of Samsung’s own work in AI, the Galaxy S24 lineup will be packed with some of the latest advances coming out of Google.

The technological improvements will also usher in a higher price for Samsung’s top-of-the-line phone, the Galaxy S24 Ultra, which will be priced at $1,300 — a $100, or 8% increase, from last year’s comparable model. The increase mirrors what Apple did with its fanciest model, the iPhone 15 Pro Max, released in September.

Samsung is holding steady on the prices for the Galaxy S24 Plus, which will sell for $1,000, and the basic Galaxy S24, which will start at $800.

All the new Galaxy phones, due in stores Jan. 31, will be packed with far more AI than before, including a feature that will provide live translation during phone calls in 13 languages and 17 dialects. The Galaxy S24 lineup will also introduce Google’s “Circle To Search” that involves using a

Titanium Violet

digital stylus or a finger to circle snippets of text, parts of photos or videos to get instant search results about whatever has been highlighted.

The new Galaxy phones will also enable quick and easy ways to manipulate the appearance and placement of specific parts of pictures taken on the devices' camera. It's a feature that could help people refine their photos, while also making it easier to create misleading images.

Google started a push last fall to infuse its latest Pixel phones with more AI, including the ability to alter the appearance of photos — an effort that the company accelerated at the end of last year with the initial rollout of project Gemini, its next technological leap. Google is also pushing out the Circle To Search tool to its latest phones, the Pixel 8 and Pixel 8 Pro, with plans to expand it to other devices running on its Android software later this year.

Besides introducing Circle To Search, Google also is drawing upon AI to enable users of its mobile app for iPhones as well as Android to point a camera at an object for a summary about what is being captured by the lens. Although Google believes Circle To Search and the Lens option will make its results even more useful, executives have also acknowledged they both may be prone to inaccuracies.

Like virtually all phone manufacturers other than Apple, Samsung relies on Google's Android operating system, so the two companies' interests have been aligned even though they compete against each other in the sale of mobile devices.

Apple is expected to put more AI into its next generation of iPhones in September, but now Samsung has a head start toward gaining the upper hand in making the technology more ubiquitous, Forrester Research analyst Thomas Husson said. It's a competitive edge that Samsung could use, having ceded its longstanding mantle as the world's largest seller of smartphones to Apple last year, according to the market research firm International Data Corp.

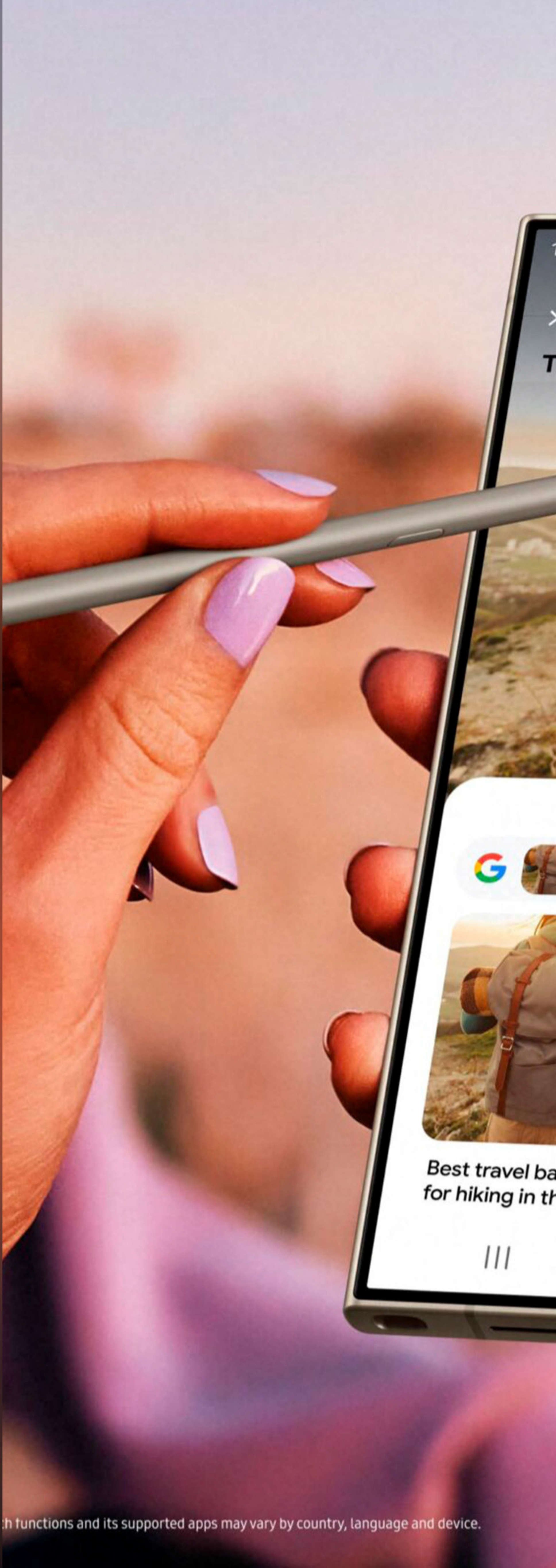
"Samsung's marketing challenge is precisely to make the technology transparent to impress consumers with magic and invisible experiences," Husson said.

The increasing use of AI in smartphones comes after the Microsoft-backed startup, OpenAI, thrust the technology into the mainstream last year with its ChatGPT bot capable of quickly creating stories, memos, videos and drawings upon request.

As AI becomes a more integral piece of smartphones, the technology will likely have broad implications on productivity, creativity and privacy, predicted Todd Lohr, U.S. technology consulting leader for KPMG.

"Intelligence is actually coming to your smartphone, which really haven't been that smart," Lohr said. "You may eventually see use cases where you could have your smartphone listen to you all day and have it provide a summary of your day at the end of it. That could create a challenge in the social construct because if everyone's device is listening to everyone, whose data is it?"

AI isn't quite that advanced yet, but Samsung already is trying to address privacy worries likely to be raised by the amount of new technology rolling out in the Galaxy S24 lineup. Samsung executives are emphasizing that the AI features can be kept on the device, although some applications may need to connect to data centers in the virtual cloud.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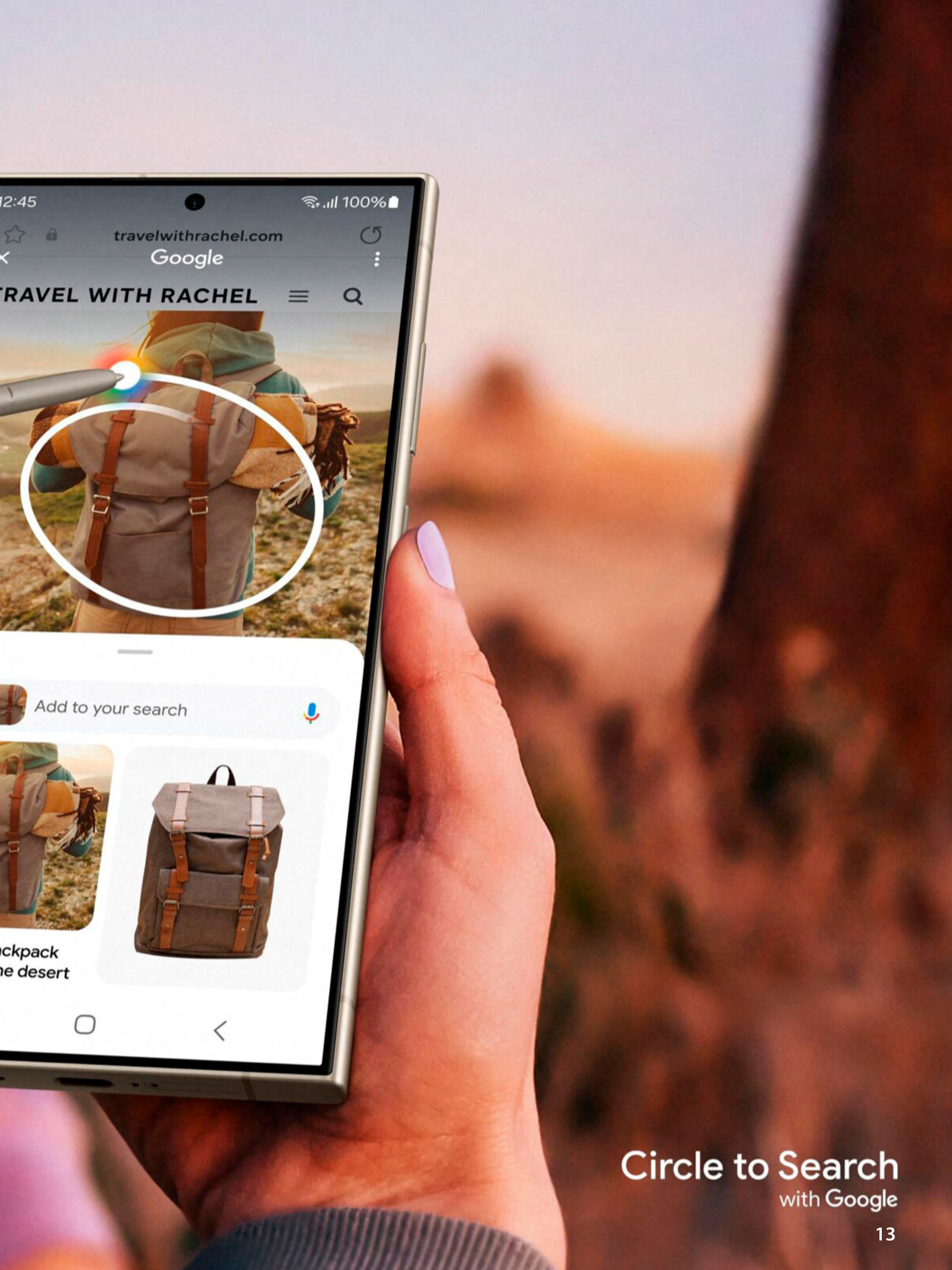
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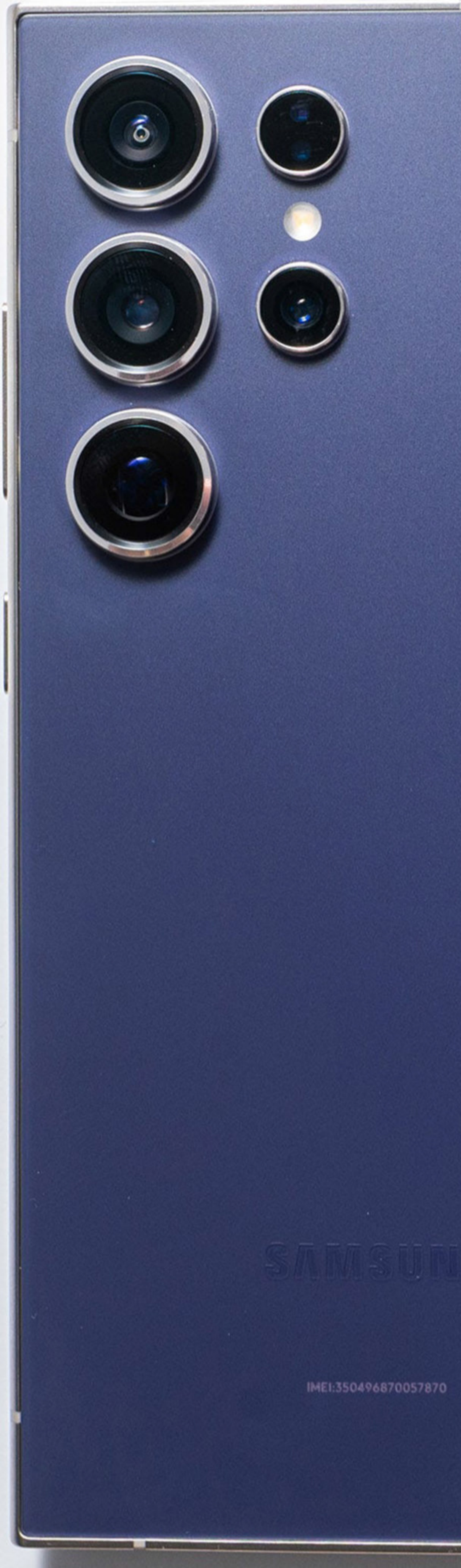
The South Korean company also is promising users that their on-device activity will be protected by its "Samsung Knox" security.

Michael Kokotajlo, KPMG's digital transformation partner of telecommunications, thinks Samsung and other smartphone makers are on the way to giving people an "AI assistant in their pockets" — a concept that he expects to be more readily adopted by younger generations that have grown up during the mobile-computing era.

"Millennials and Gen Z are definitely going to be looking for these AI capabilities because they don't have as much concern about privacy and security, but some of the older generations may have more concerns about that or how do you even leverage all of it," Kokotajlo said.



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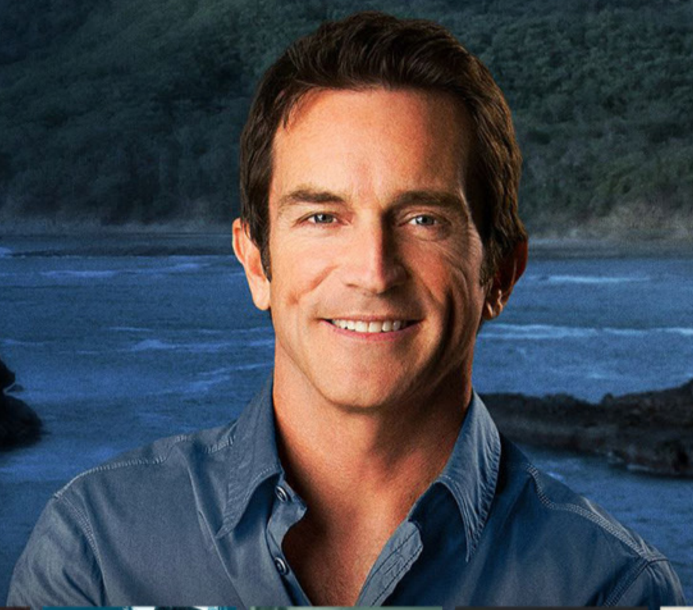

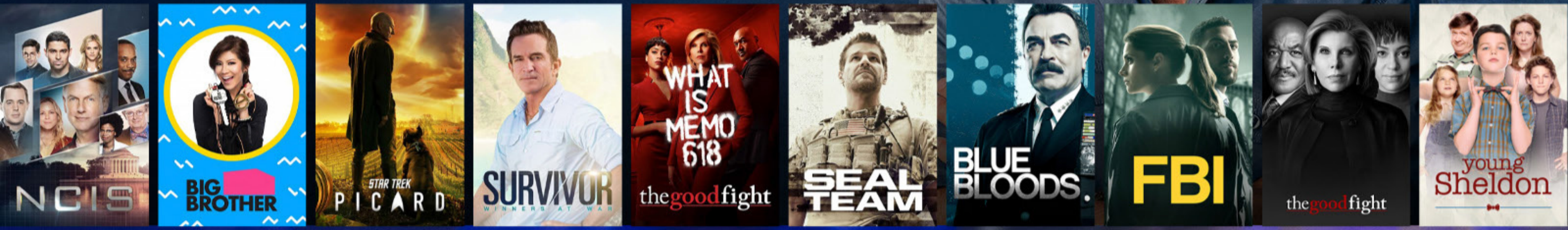
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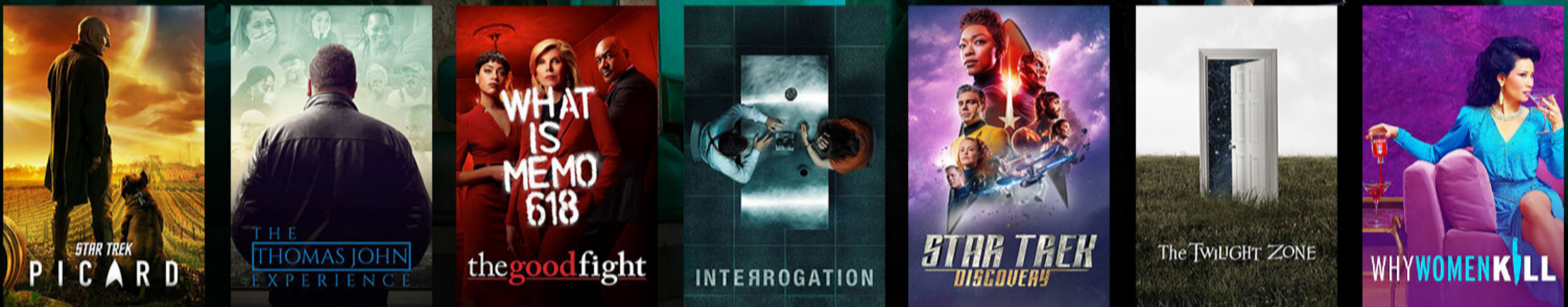
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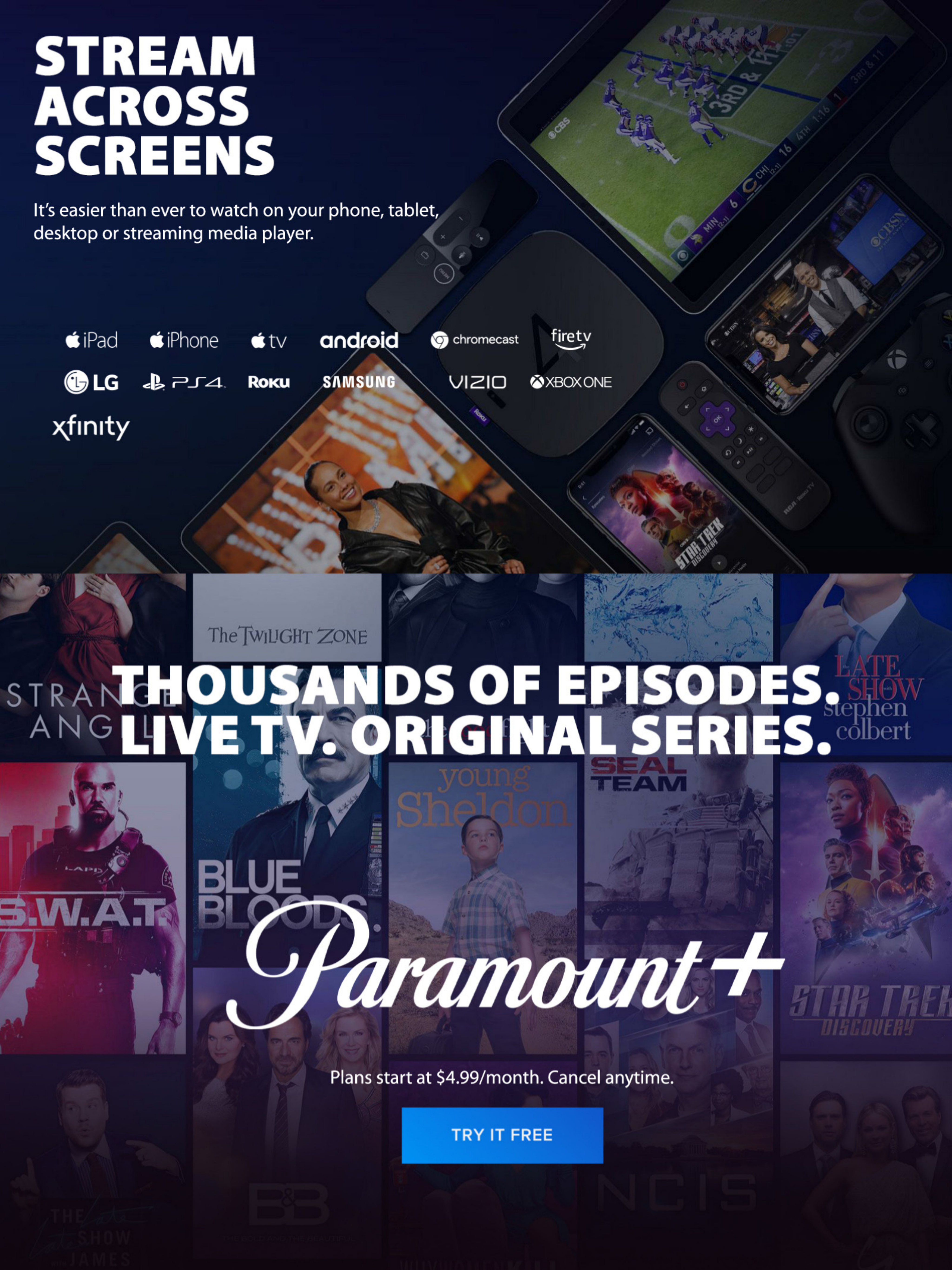

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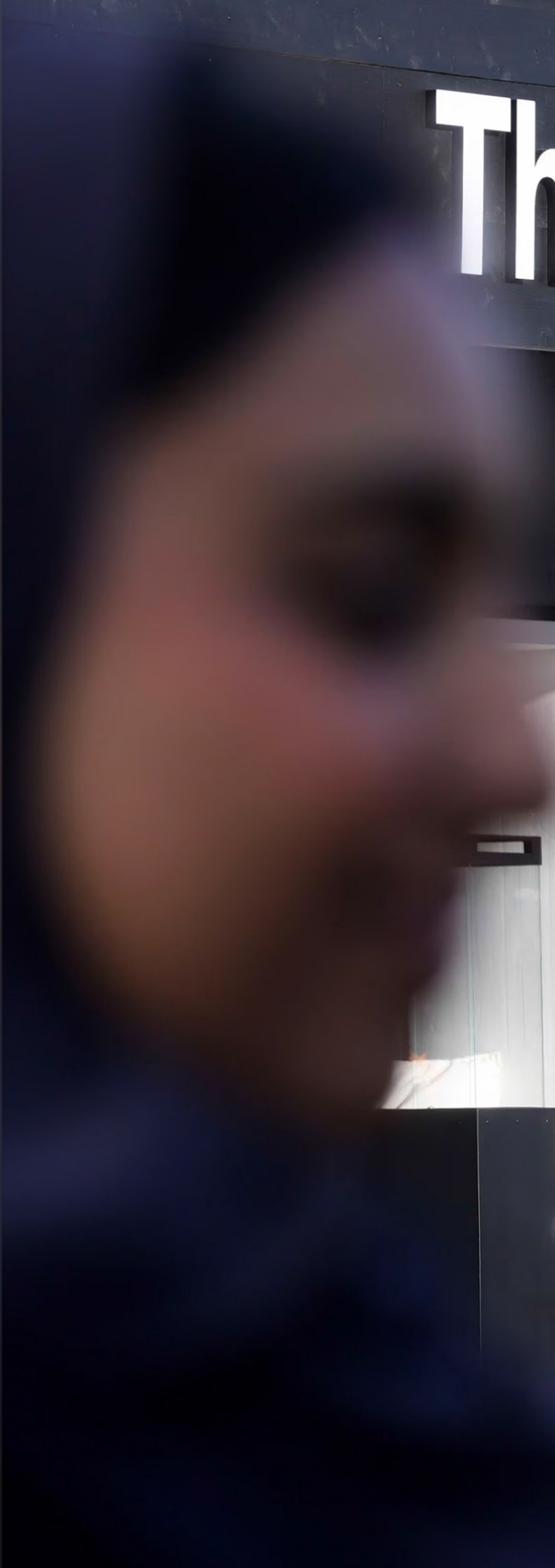
AI IS THE BUZZ, THE BIG OPPORTUNITY AND THE RISK TO WATCH AMONG THE DAVOS GLITTERATI



Artificial intelligence is easily the biggest buzzword for world leaders and corporate bosses diving into big ideas at the World Economic Forum's glitzy annual meeting in Davos. Breathtaking advances in generative AI stunned the world last year, and the elite crowd is angling to take advantage of its promise and minimize its risks.

In a sign of ChatGPT maker OpenAI's skyrocketing profile, CEO Sam Altman made his Davos debut to rock star crowds, with his benefactor, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, hot on his heels.

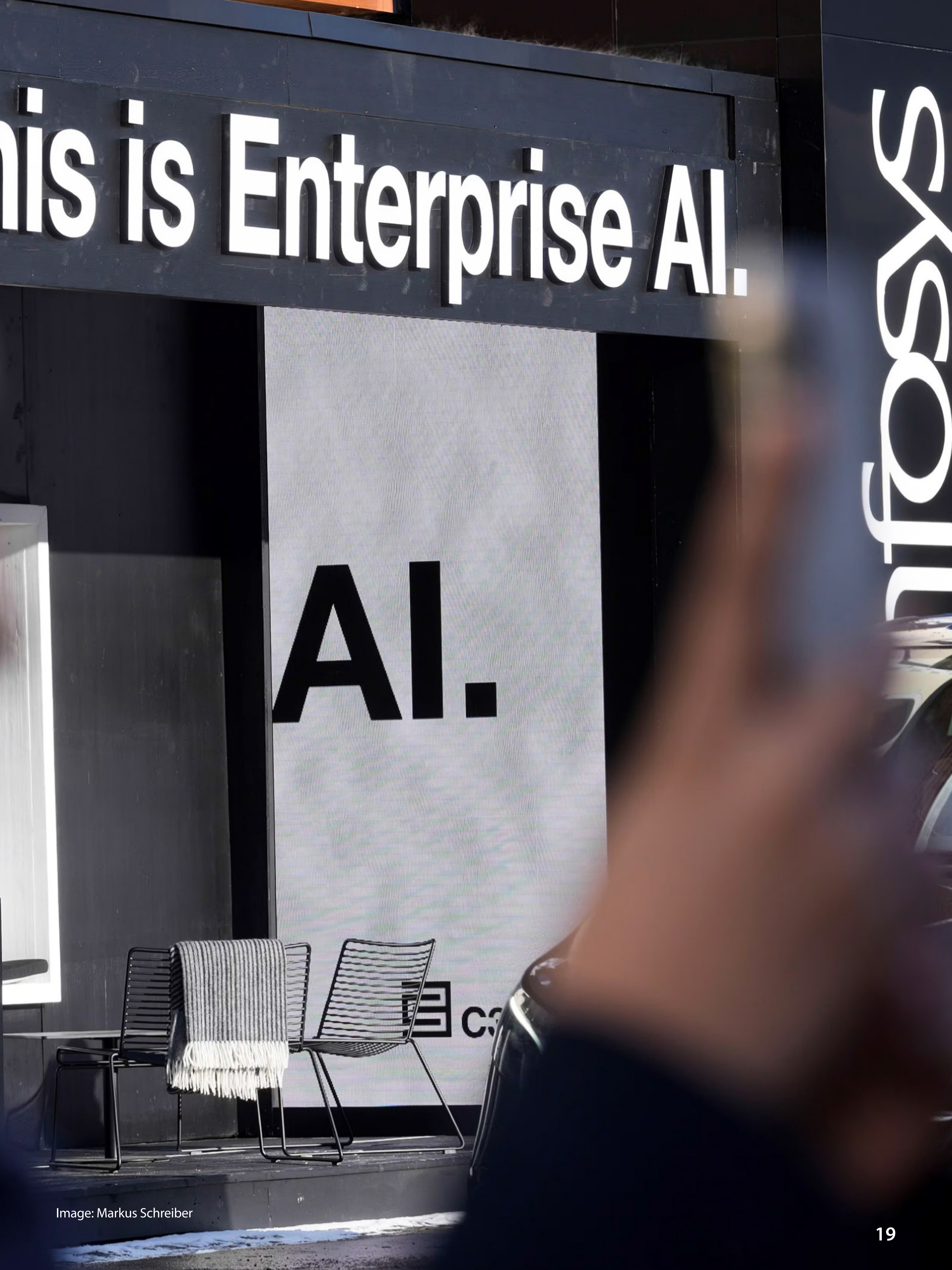

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Image: Markus Schreiber

Illustrating AI's geopolitical importance like few other technologies before it, the word was on the lips of world leaders from China to France. It was visible across the Swiss Alpine town and percolated through afterparties.

Here's a look at the buzz:

OPENAI OPENING BIG AT DAVOS

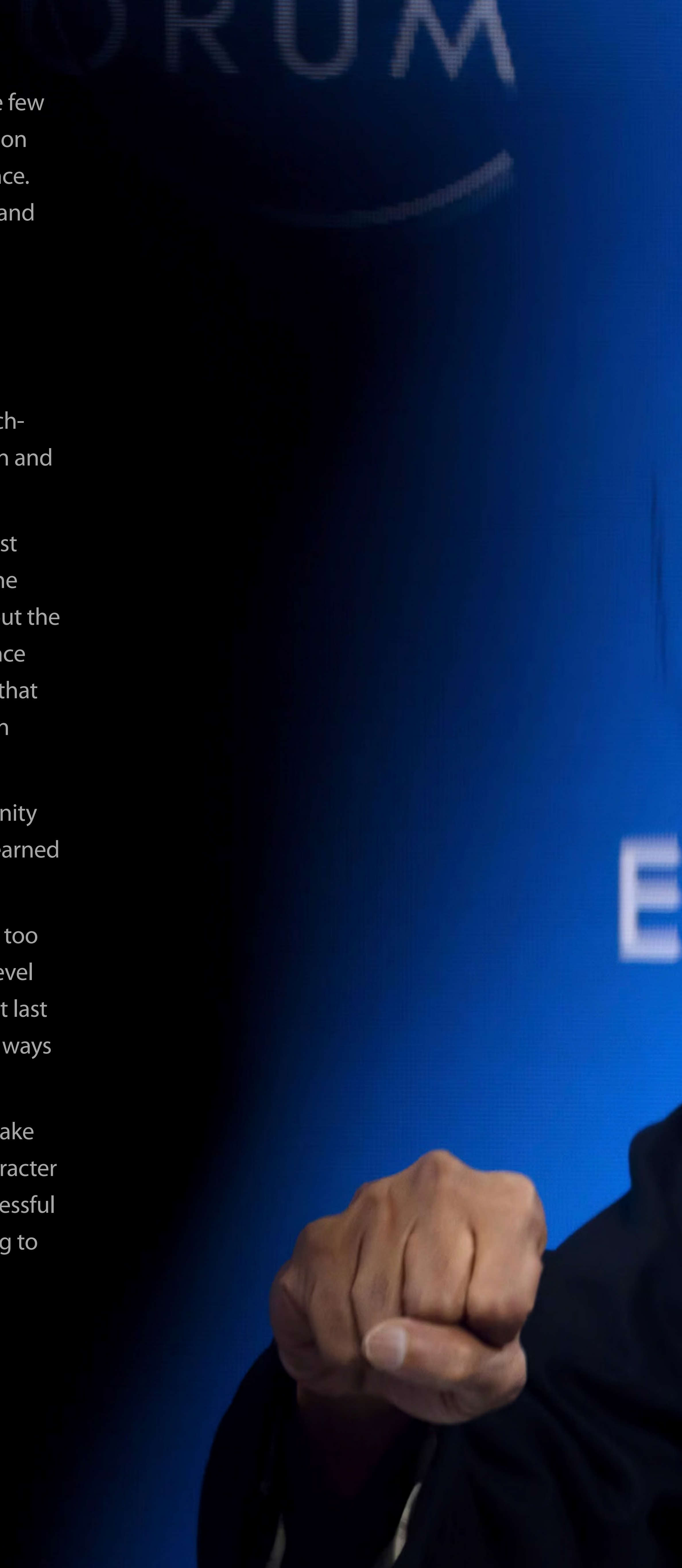
The leadership drama at the AI world's much-ballyhooed chatbot maker followed Altman and Nadella to the swanky Swiss snows.

Altman's sudden firing and swift rehiring last year cemented his position as the face of the generative AI revolution but questions about the boardroom bustup and OpenAI's governance lingered. He told a Bloomberg interviewer that he's focused on getting a "great full board in place" and deflected further questions.

At a Davos panel on technology and humanity Thursday, a question about what Altman learned from the upheaval came at the end.

"We had known that our board had gotten too small, and we knew that we didn't have a level of experience we needed," Altman said. "But last year was such a wild year for us in so many ways that we sort of just neglected it."

Altman added that for "every one step we take closer to very powerful AI, everybody's character gets, like, plus 10 crazy points. It's a very stressful thing. And it should be because we're trying to be responsible about very high stakes."



WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Image: Gian Ehrenzeller

WORLD LEADERS WANT TO LEAD THE WORLD ON AI

From China to Europe, top officials staked their positions on AI as the world grapples with regulating the rapidly developing technology that has big implications for workplaces, elections and privacy.

The European Union has devised the world's first comprehensive AI rules ahead of a busy election year, with AI-powered misinformation and disinformation the biggest risk to the global economy as it threatens to erode democracy and polarize society, according to a World Economic Forum report released last week.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang called AI "a double-edged sword."

"Human beings must control the machines instead of having the machines control us," he said in a speech Tuesday.

"AI must be guided in a direction that is conducive to the progress of humanity, so there should be a redline in AI development — a red line that must not be crossed," Li said, without elaborating.

China, one of the world's centers of AI development, wants to "step up communication and cooperation with all parties" on improving global AI governance, Li said.

China has released interim regulations for managing generative AI, but the EU broke ground with its AI Act, which won a hard-fought political deal last month and awaits final sign-off.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said AI is "a very significant opportunity, if used in a responsible way."

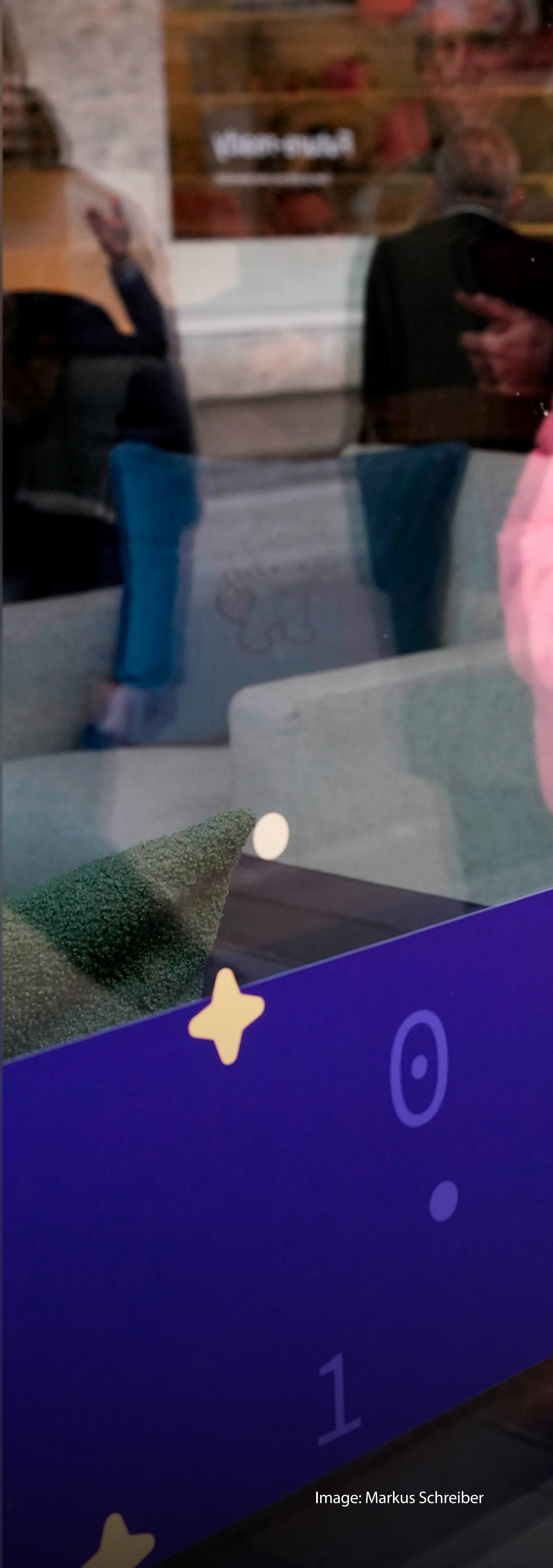


Image: Markus Schreiber

Let's bring AI
and ethics
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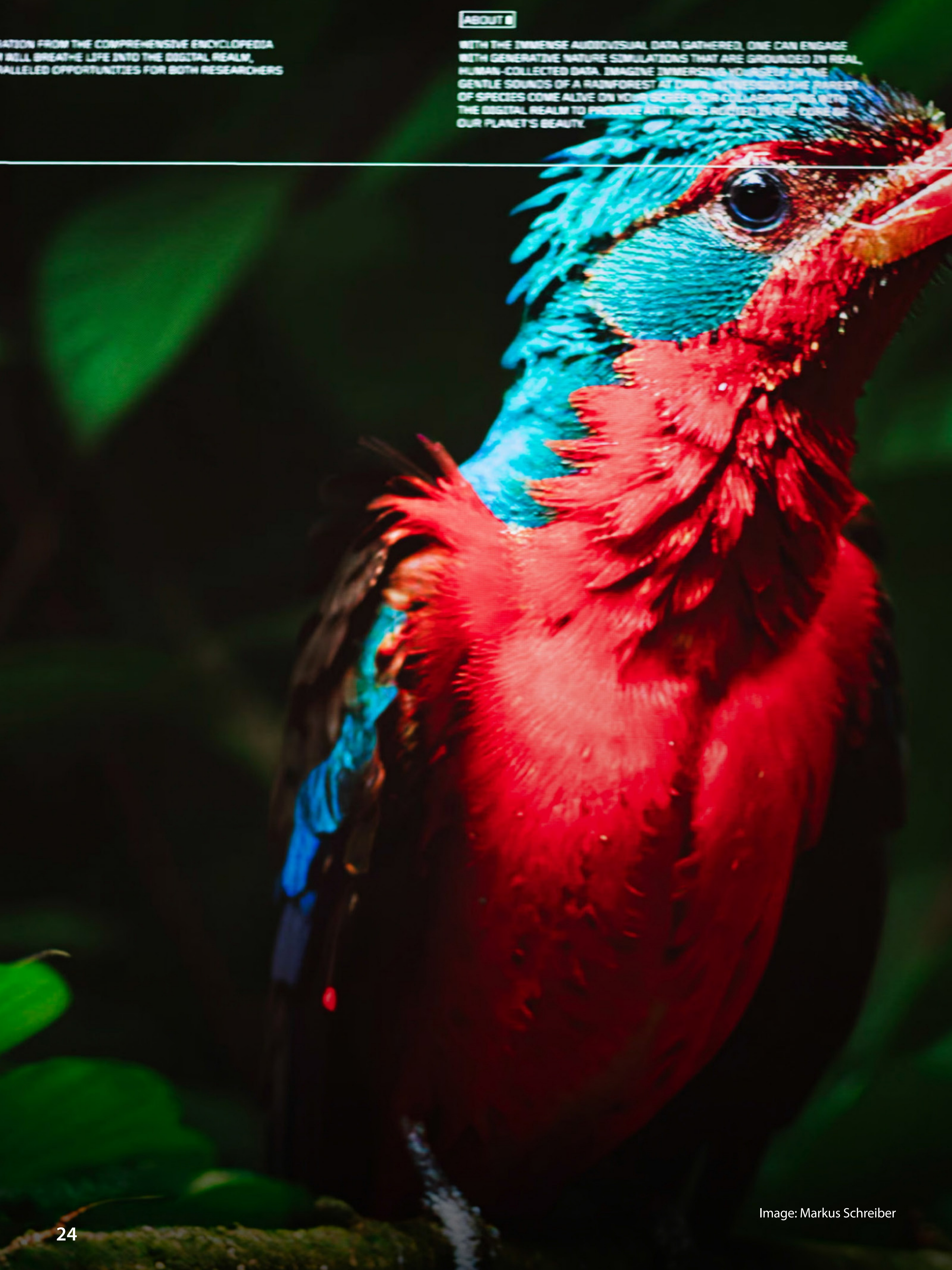

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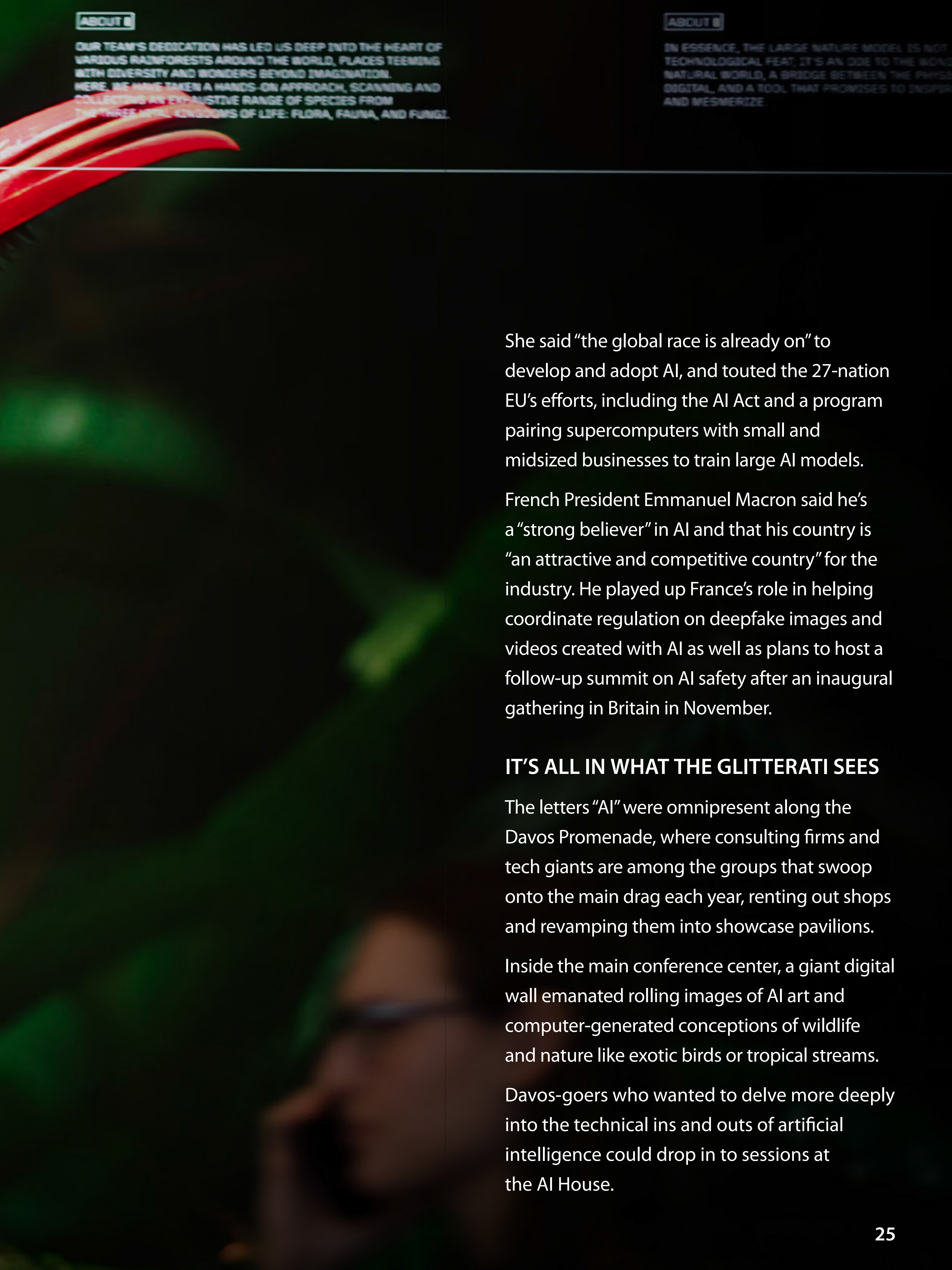
Image: Markus Schreiber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ABOUT
IN ESSENCE, THE LARGE NATURE MODEL IS NOT
TECHNOLOGICAL FEAT; IT'S AN ODE TO THE
NATURAL WORLD, A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE
DIGITAL, AND A TOOL THAT PROMISES TO
AND MESMERIZE.

She said "the global race is already on" to develop and adopt AI, and touted the 27-nation EU's efforts, including the AI Act and a program pairing supercomputers with small and midsized businesses to train large AI models.

French President Emmanuel Macron said he's a "strong believer" in AI and that his country is "an attractive and competitive country" for the industry. He played up France's role in helping coordinate regulation on deepfake images and videos created with AI as well as plans to host a follow-up summit on AI safety after an inaugural gathering in Britain in November.

IT'S ALL IN WHAT THE GLITTERATI SEES

The letters "AI" were omnipresent along the Davos Promenade, where consulting firms and tech giants are among the groups that swoop onto the main drag each year, renting out shops and revamping them into showcase pavilions.

Inside the main conference center, a giant digital wall emanated rolling images of AI art and computer-generated conceptions of wildlife and nature like exotic birds or tropical streams.

Davos-goers who wanted to delve more deeply into the technical ins and outs of artificial intelligence could drop in to sessions at the AI House.

THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE

Generative AI systems like ChatGPT and Google's Bard captivated the world by rapidly spewing out new poems, images and computer code and are expected to have a sweeping impact on life and work.

The technology could help give a boost to the stagnating global economy, said Nadella, whose company is rolling out the technology in its products.

The Microsoft chief said he's "very optimistic about AI being that general purpose technology that drives economic growth."

Business leaders predicted AI will help automate mundane work tasks or make it easier for people to do advanced jobs, but they also warned that it would threaten workers who can't keep up.

A survey of 4,700 CEOs in more than 100 countries by PwC, released at the start of the Davos meetings, said 14% think they'll have to lay off staff because of the rise of generative AI.

"There isn't an area, there isn't an industry that's not going to be impacted" by AI, said Julie Sweet, CEO of consulting firm Accenture.

Image: Markus Schreiber

For those who can move with the change, AI promises to transform tasks like computer coding and customer relations and streamline business functions like invoicing, IBM CEO Arvind Krishna said.

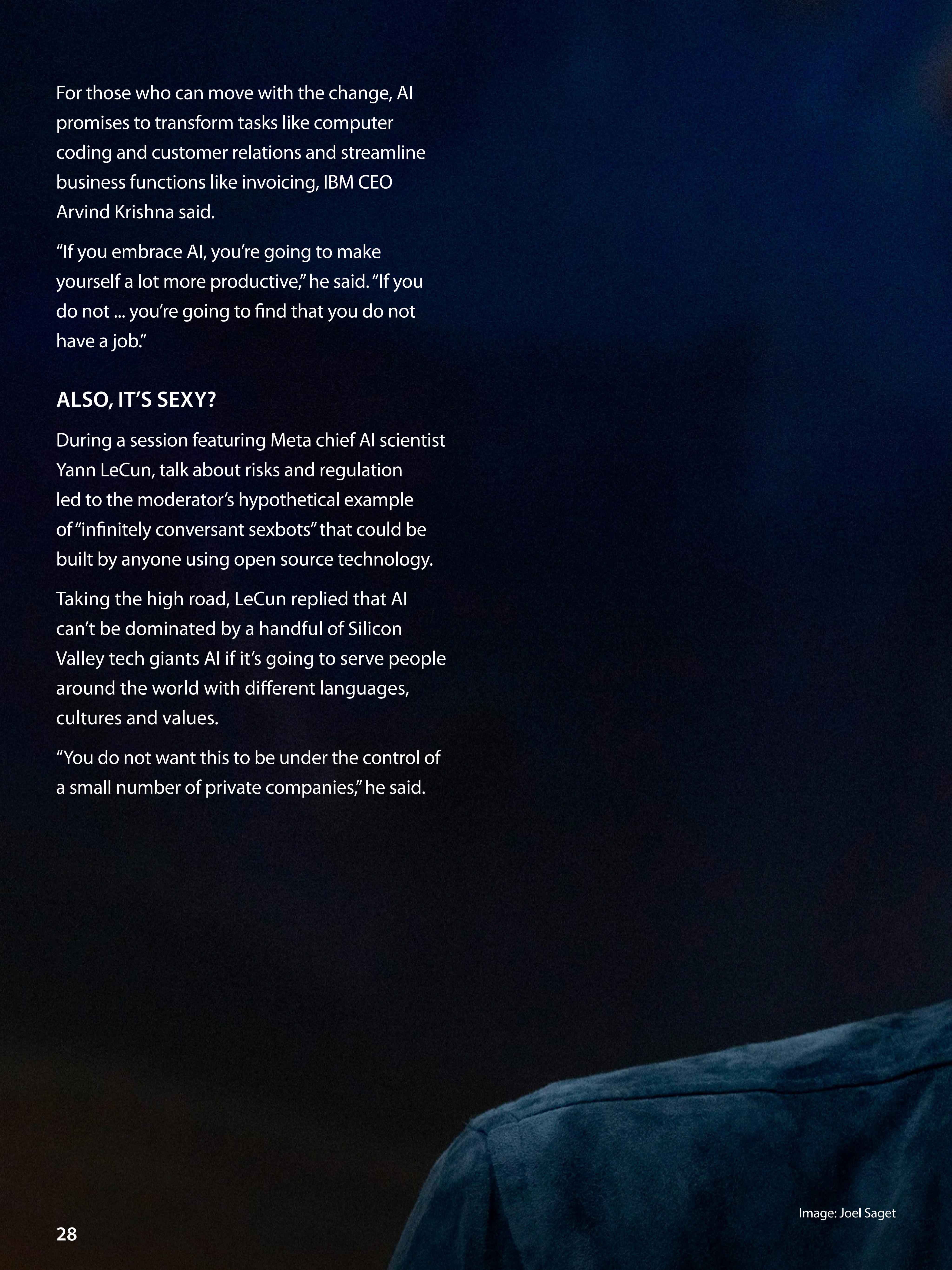
“If you embrace AI, you’re going to make yourself a lot more productive,” he said. “If you do not ... you’re going to find that you do not have a job.”

ALSO, IT’S SEXY?

During a session featuring Meta chief AI scientist Yann LeCun, talk about risks and regulation led to the moderator’s hypothetical example of “infinitely conversant sexbots” that could be built by anyone using open source technology.

Taking the high road, LeCun replied that AI can’t be dominated by a handful of Silicon Valley tech giants AI if it’s going to serve people around the world with different languages, cultures and values.

“You do not want this to be under the control of a small number of private companies,” he said.



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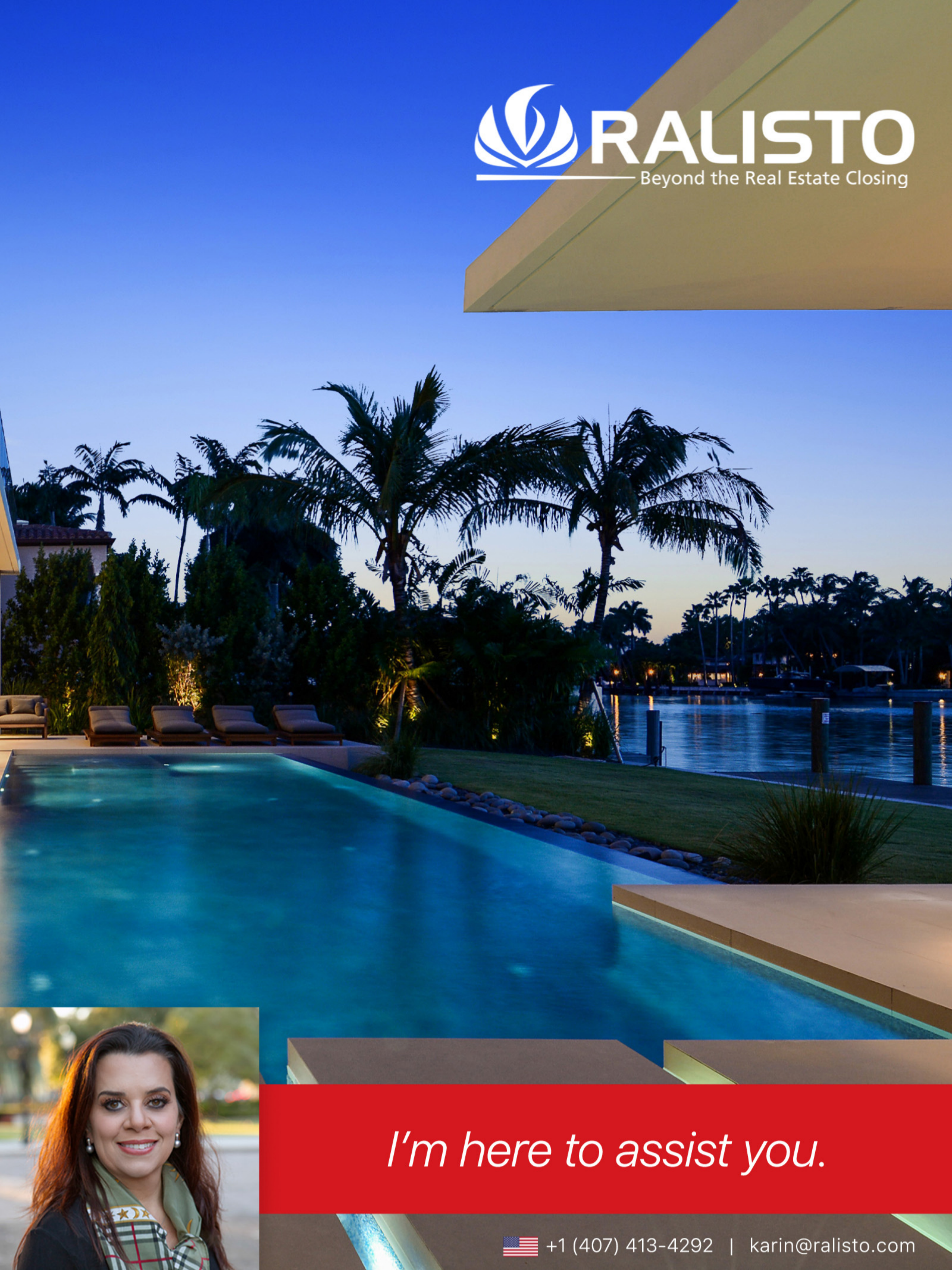

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FRIGID WEATHER CAN CUT ELECTRIC VEHICLE RANGE AND MAKE CHARGING TOUGH. HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

For nearly a week, frigid temperatures from Chicago to northern Texas have made life painful for electric-vehicle owners, with reduced driving range and hours of waiting at charging stations.

In Oak Brook, Illinois, near Chicago, television reporters found Teslas that were running out of juice while in long lines for plugs at a Supercharger station. The temperature hit a low of minus 9 Fahrenheit (-23 Celsius).

Image: Carlos Osorio

Outside of Ann Arbor, Michigan, Teslas were plugged in at six of eight charging stations Wednesday as the wind howled with a temperature of 7 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 14 Celsius). At least one driver was nearly out of juice.

It's well known that EVs lose some of their travel range in the cold, especially in subzero temperatures like those that hit the nation's midsection this week. Studies found that range loss varies from 10% to 36%.

EVs also don't charge as quickly in extreme cold. Some Tesla owners near Chicago told reporters their cars wouldn't charge at all.

Experts acknowledge that cold weather can be hard for EVs, but they say with some planning and a little adjustment, owners should be able to travel pretty much as normal.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Inside EV batteries, lithium ions flow through a liquid electrolyte, producing electricity. But they travel more slowly through the electrolyte when it gets cold and don't release as much energy. That cuts into the range and can deplete a battery faster.

The same happens in reverse. Since electrons move more slowly, the battery can't accept as much electricity from a charging plug. That slows down charging.

The problem is that when temperatures plunge, batteries have to be warm enough for the electrons to move. And they have to be even warmer at fast-charging stations like Tesla's.

"Pretty much anything that's a chemical substance slows down when you get to a low temperature," said Neil Dasgupta, associate professor of mechanical and materials science engineering at the University of Michigan. "That's just something that nature has given us, and we have to deal with that."

At a Supercharger station in Pittsfield Township, Michigan, just south of Ann Arbor, the battery in Ankita Bansal's Tesla had only 7% of its charge left. She plugged in, but the car wouldn't take electricity. Instead, the display said the battery was heating up. After it hits the proper temperature, it would take an hour and 50 minutes to get to a full charge, the display said.

"I have a long way to go," said Bansal, a University of Michigan graduate student who wanted to get to a full charge because she doesn't have a charging station at home.

HOW TO MAKE IT WORK

Bruce Westlake, president of the Eastern Michigan Electric Vehicle Association, said most EVs are programmed to warm the battery if the driver tells vehicle's navigation system that a trip to the charging station is coming.

Many of those who think their cars won't charge are new to EVs and don't know how to "precondition" their batteries, said Westlake, who has two Teslas.

"They're just learning," he said. "And Tesla isn't very good at explaining some things." A message was left seeking comment from Tesla.

In frigid temperatures, it can take a half hour to warm the battery so it's ready to charge,

START
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START
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Image: Dita Alangkara

Westlake said. Preconditioning the battery does cost some range, although it's usually only a few miles, he said.

Bansal, who has had her Tesla for only a week, didn't know about preconditioning the car before charging, but she does now.

A few stalls away from her, Kim Burney's Tesla Model 3 was charging just a little slower than it does in normal temperatures. She had driven farther than she thought on a trip to her dentist in Ann Arbor Wednesday morning and wanted to get close to a full charge for the rest of the day's travels.

So she told the car she was going to the charging station and it was ready by the time she arrived and plugged in.

Like Westlake, Burney said EV drivers need to plan ahead, especially in cold weather. The car, she said, will tell you where charging stations are and how much range you have left. "The more you drive it the more you're comfortable knowing how far you can go and how much to charge it," she said.

Burney said she loses roughly 15% to 20% of her battery range in cold weather, but it gets dramatically worse in cold snaps like the one this week.

THE FUTURE OF CHARGING

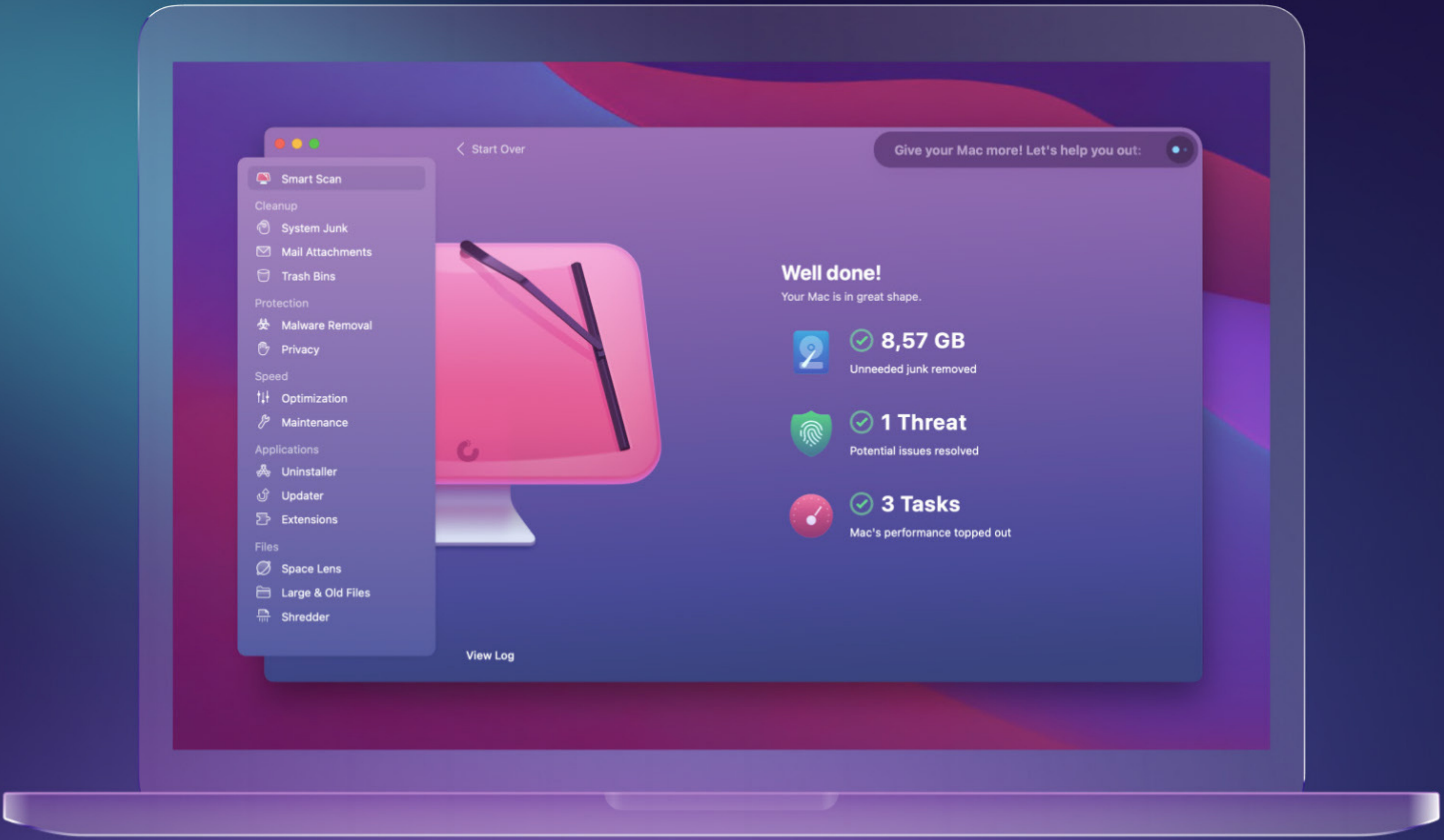
In the short run, automakers are likely to come up with better ways to protect battery life and warm them for charging, Dasgupta said. And there are new battery chemistries in development that are more resilient in cold weather.

In the short term, Dasgupta said that as more mainstream consumers buy EVs, and as more automakers enter the market, they'll develop models using existing lithium-ion chemistry that are tailored to colder climates. In some cases overall range might have to be sacrificed a little to get better cold-weather performance, he said.

Millions are being invested in new battery technology that performs better in the cold that will find its way from military, aerospace and undersea applications into electric vehicles, Dasgupta said.

"You can be an EV driver in a cold-weather climate," he said. "Be optimistic and excited about what the future holds because it's only going to get better from here."

EV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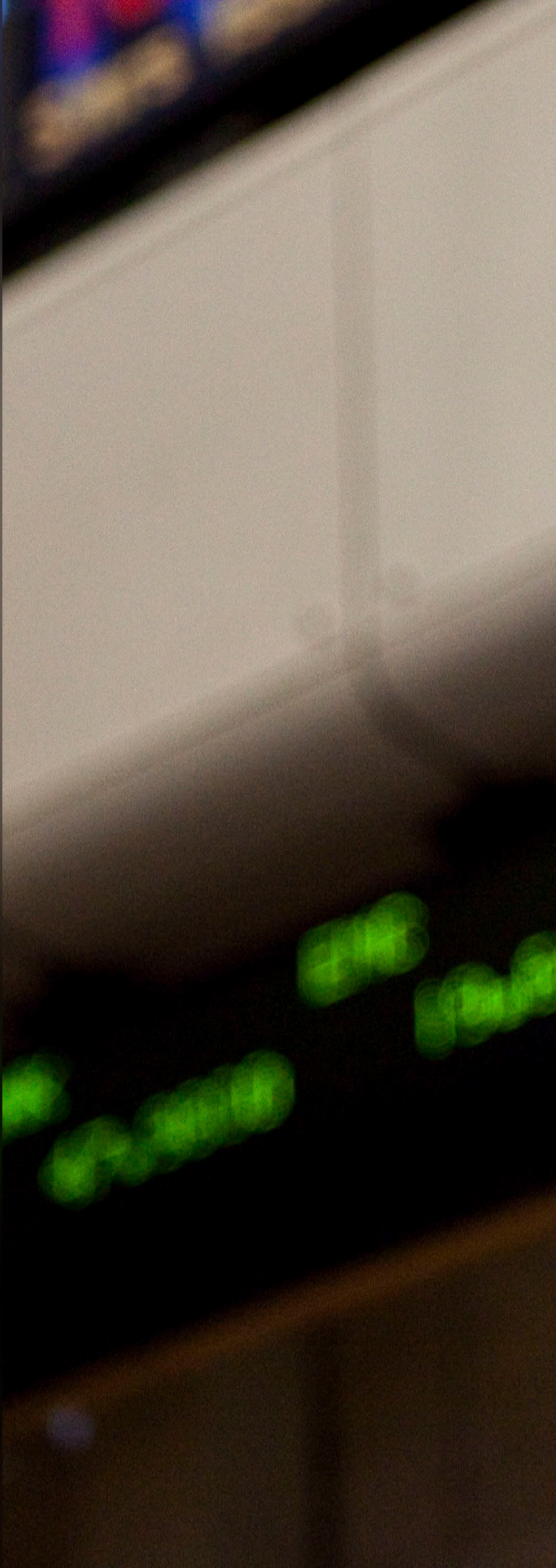
GOLDMAN SACHS 4Q PROFITS JUMP 51%, BUT FULL YEAR REFLECTS DIFFICULT QUARTER FOR THE BANK



Goldman Sachs' profits jumped 51% from a year earlier, the investment banks said this week, helped by the strong returns in the overall market in the last three months of the year.

However the storied investment bank closed out a difficult 2023 with its profits down nearly a third from 2022, as the bank wrote off its consumer banking franchise and laid off employees in what the bank has called a turnaround year.

Goldman posted a profit of $2 billion in the last three months of the year, up from $1.33 billion

Goldman Sachs

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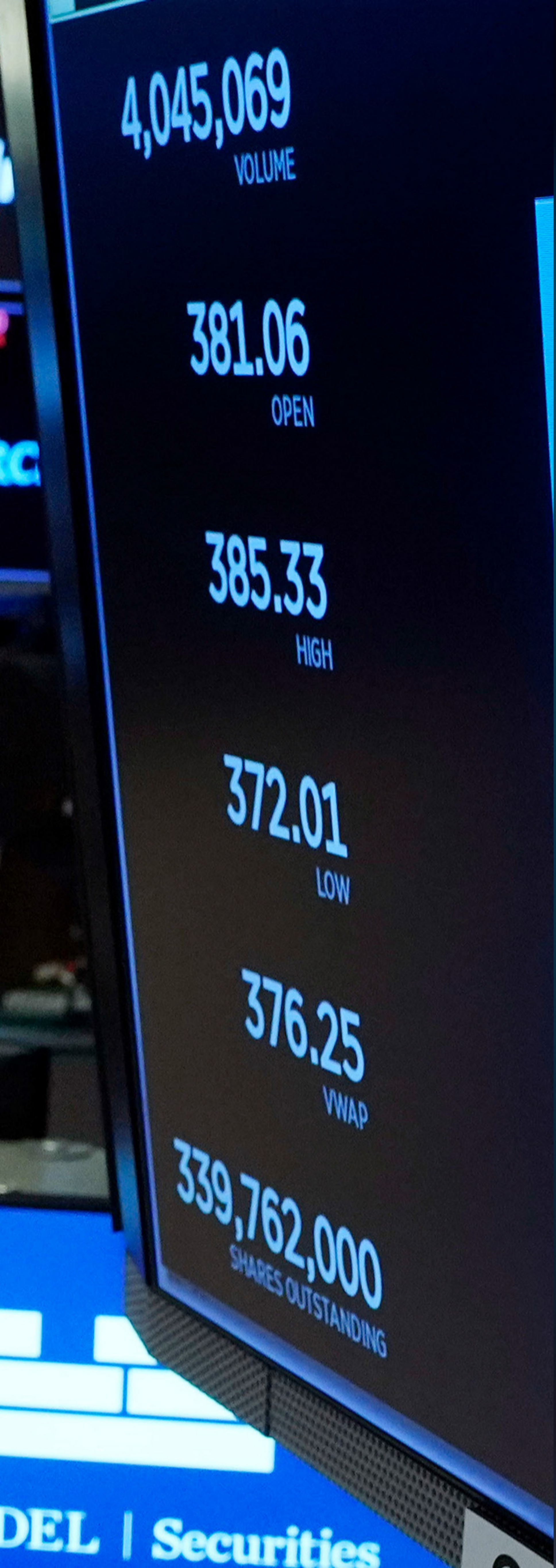


in the same period a year earlier. On a per-share basis, Goldman earned $5.48 per share, beating analysts' expectations.

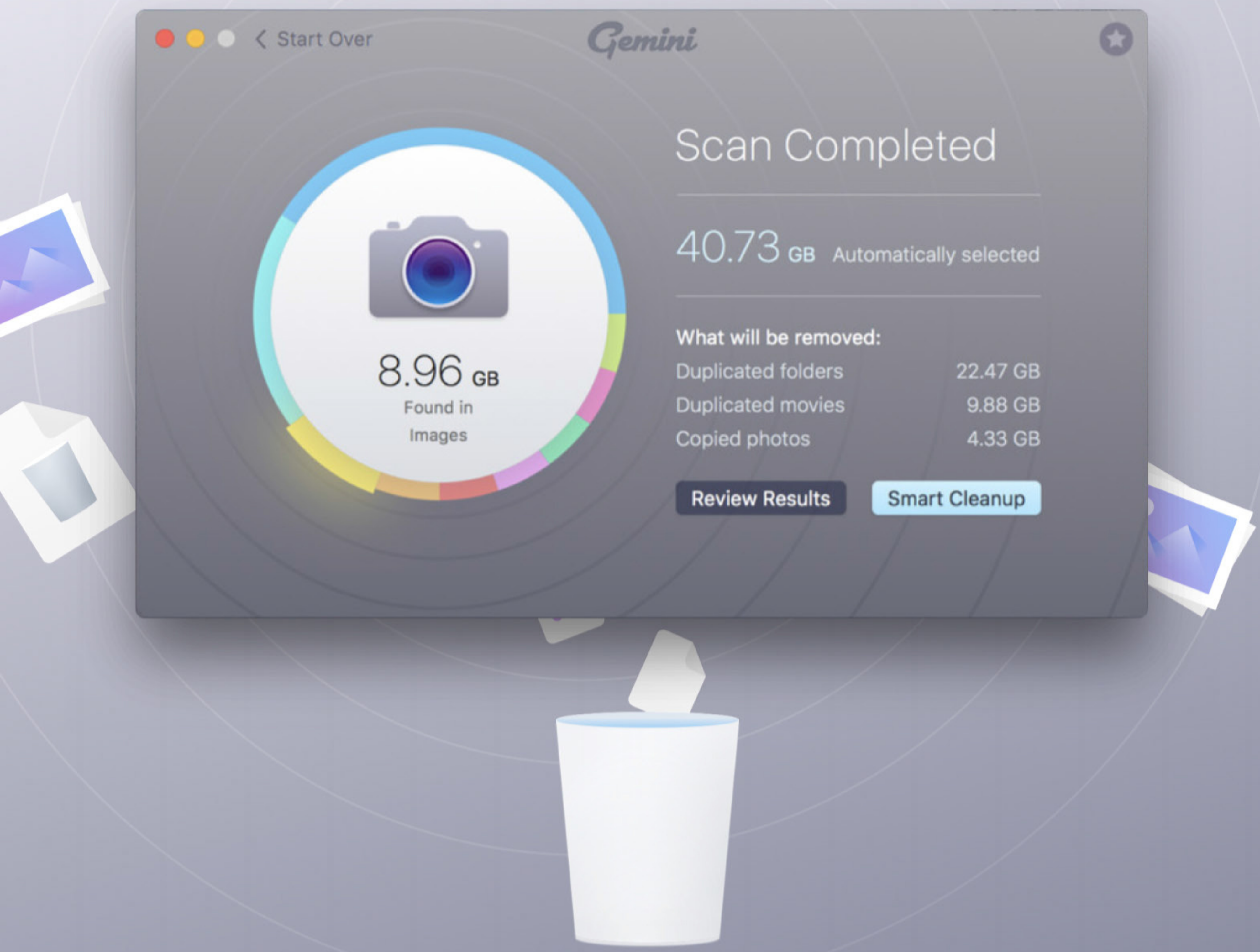
The bank saw modest improvements in its trading and investment management divisions, but saw declines in its important investment banking and advising revenues. A number of companies held off doing any big deals in 2023, due to the high cost of financing, which means Goldman and the other investment banks had fewer deals to put together.

The biggest lift to Goldman's results came in a $838 million gain in the investments that the bank had placed in other companies, a reflection of how well the market did in the last three months of 2023.

But for the full year, Goldman struggled. Investment banking fees were down 16% from 2022, and trading in commodities, currencies and fixed income was down 18%. Goldman announced last year that it was going wind down its Marcus consumer banking division, and there are reports that it wants to sell off its credit card division.

The bank's return on common equity — a measure used by investment banks to show well they perform with their underlying assets — was 7.5% last year. Typically Goldman and other banks like to have that figure above 10%

The bank cut 7% of its workforce last year, and the money it set aside for compensation and benefits this year was up a modest 2%, likely signaling more moderate bonuses for Goldman employees who largely get their compensation in the form of year-end performance packages.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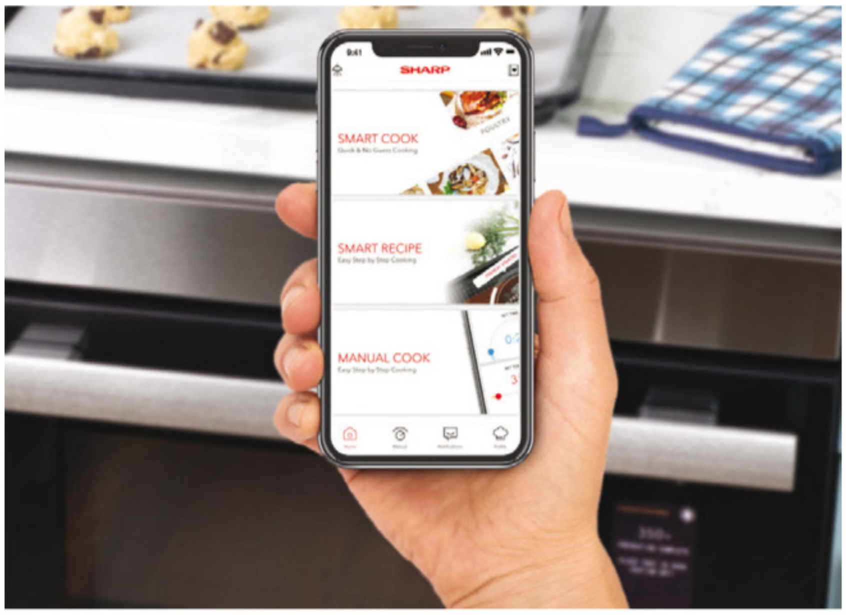

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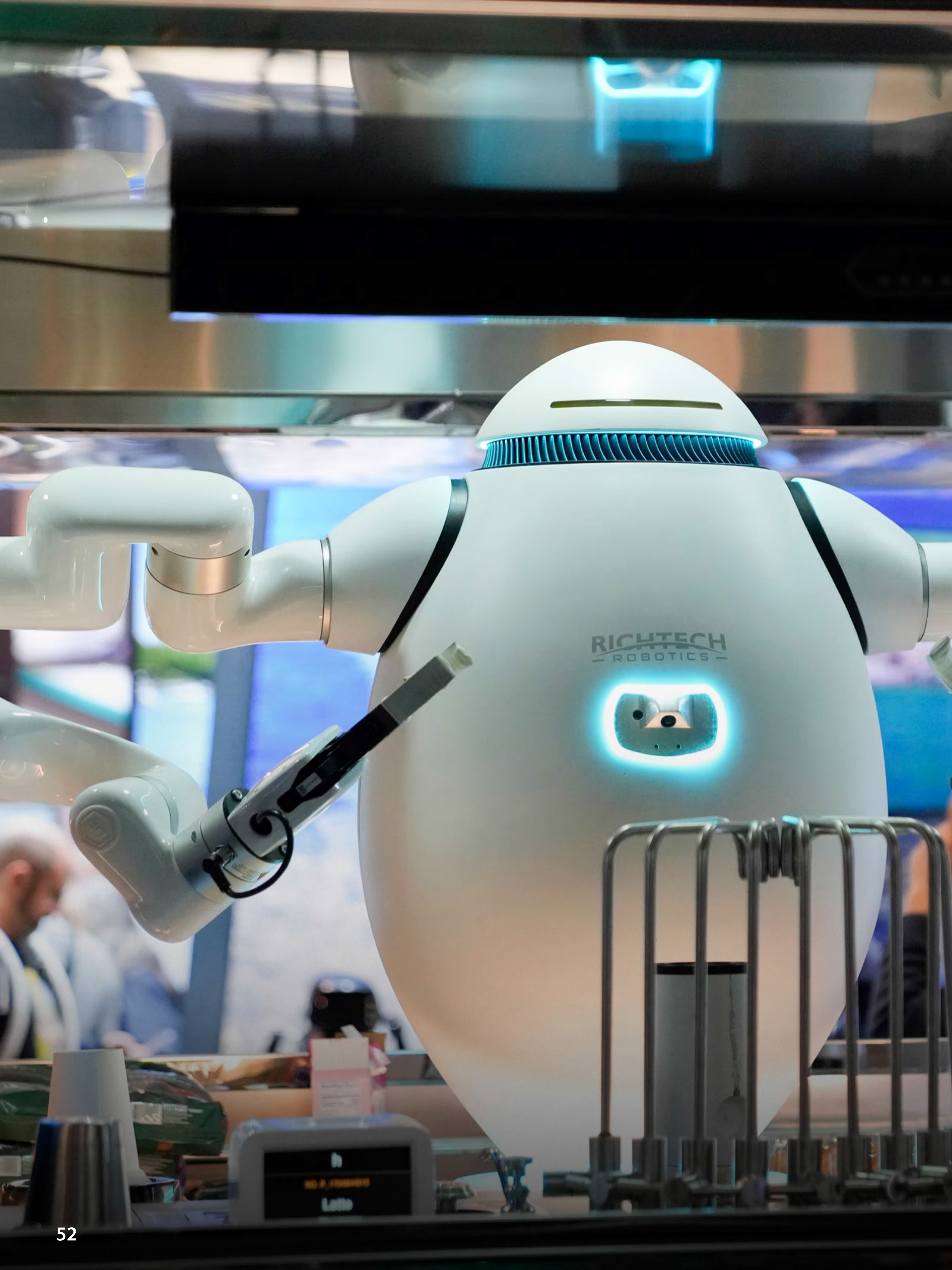
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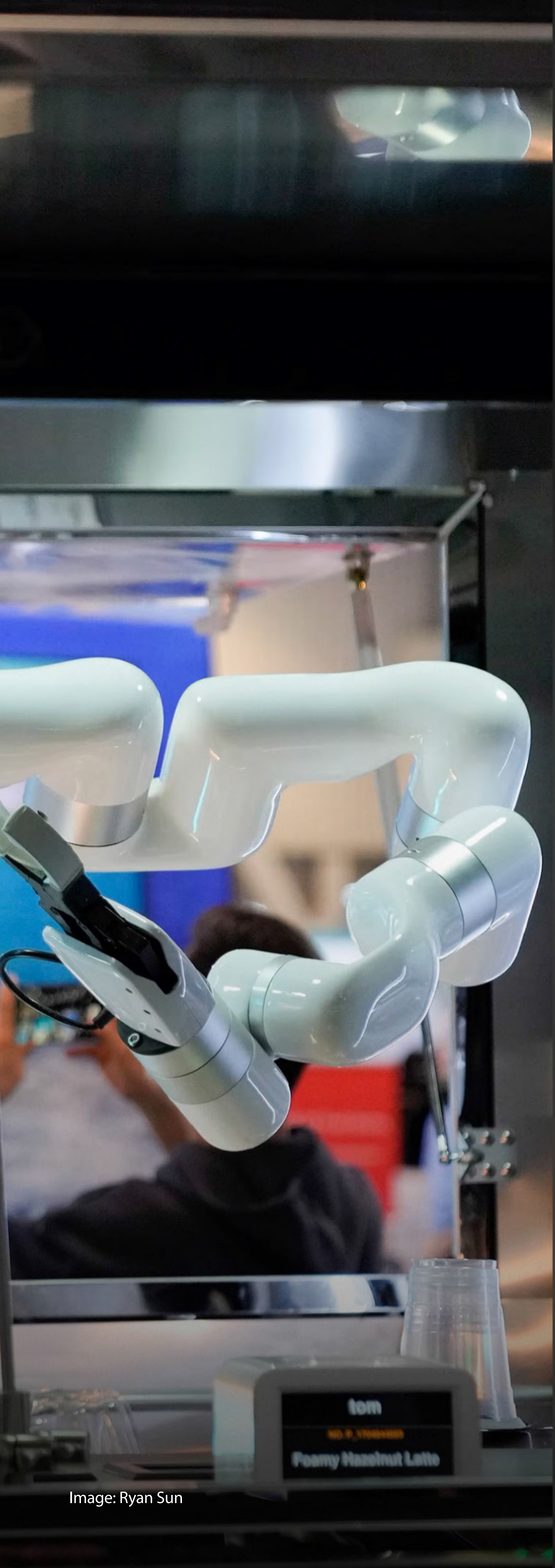


Image: Ryan Sun

ROBOT BARISTAS AND AI CHEFS CAUSED A STIR AT CES 2024 AS CASINO UNION WORKERS FEAR FOR THEIR JOBS

The barista tipped the jug of smooth, foamy milk over the latte, pouring slowly at first, then lifting and tilting the jug like a choreographed dance to paint the petals of a tulip.

Latte art is a skill that can take months if not years of practice to master — but not for this barista powered by artificial intelligence.

Robots of all kinds caused a stir on the show floor last week at the annual CES technology trade show in Las Vegas.

It's innovations like this that worry Roman Alejo, a 34-year-old barista at the Sahara hotel-casino on the Las Vegas Strip, who can't help but wonder if the clock is ticking on hospitality jobs in the age of AI.

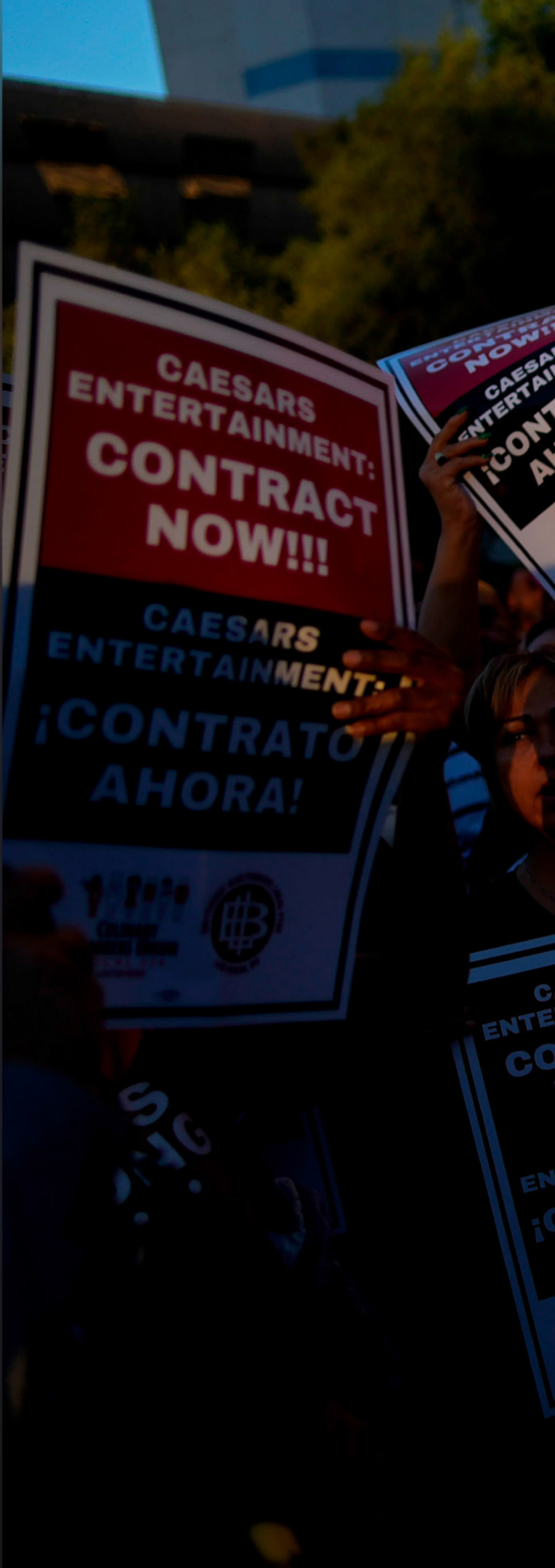
"It is very scary because tomorrow is never promised," he said. "A lot of AI is coming into this world. It is very scary and very eye-opening to see how humans can think of replacing other humans."

The world's largest tech show put those fears back under the spotlight just a little over a month after the casino workers union in Las Vegas ratified new contracts for 40,000 members, ending a bitter, high-profile fight that called attention to AI's threat to union jobs.

"Technology was a strike issue and one of the very last issues to be resolved," said Ted Pappageorge, the Culinary Workers Union's secretary-treasurer who led the teams that negotiated new five-year contracts, narrowly averting a historic strike at more than a dozen hotel-casinos on the Strip.

Hospitality workers told The Associated Press in interviews over eight months of bargaining that they were willing to take a cut in pay while on strike to win stronger job protection against inevitable advancements in technology. That includes technology already at play at some resorts: self check-in stations, automated valet ticket services and robot bartenders known as "tipsy robots."

Pappageorge said the emergence of robotics in the hospitality and service industry has been on the union's radar for years. The difference now,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VEGAS STRONG

Image: John Locker

he told The Associated Press this week, "is the combination of artificial intelligence and robotics."

Experts say that breakthrough in AI technology has forced labor unions to rethink how they negotiate with companies.

Bill Werner, an associate professor in the hospitality department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, said unions now have to be "much more deliberate" in their negotiations for job security.

The types of casino union jobs at risk could look drastically different five years from now, for example, when the Culinary Union's contract ends.

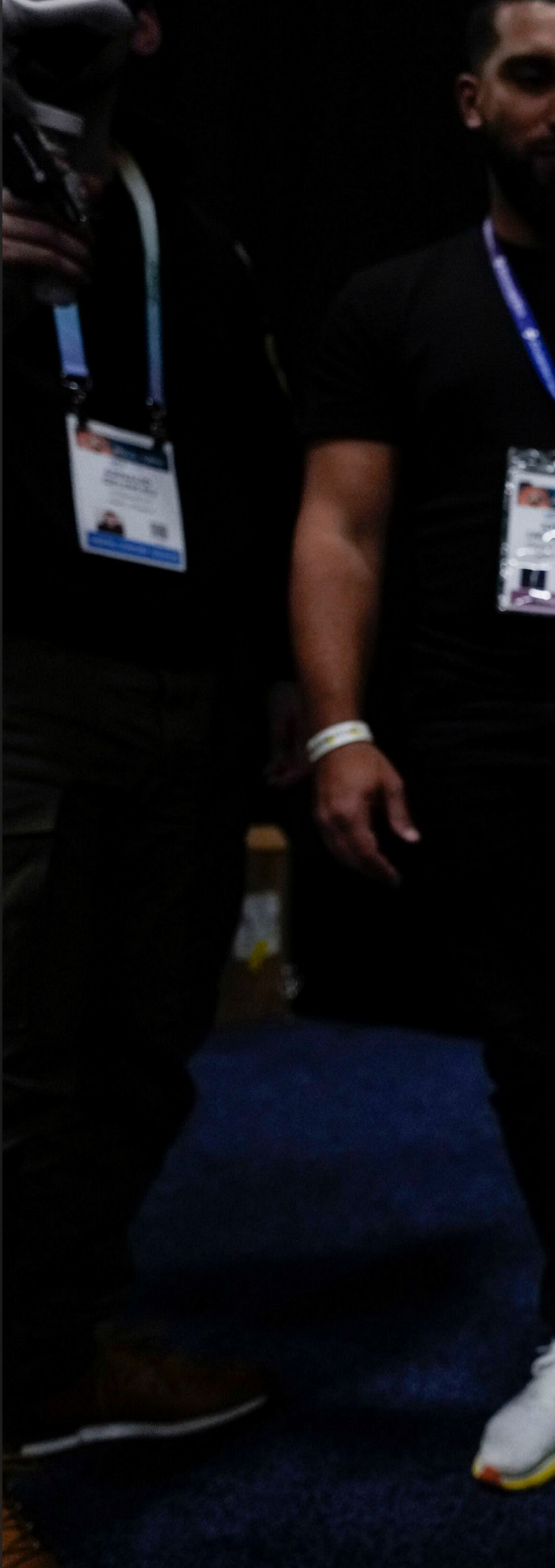
"What is going to happen to these people and what rights do they have?" he said. "And what happens to them if they lose their job to a robot?"

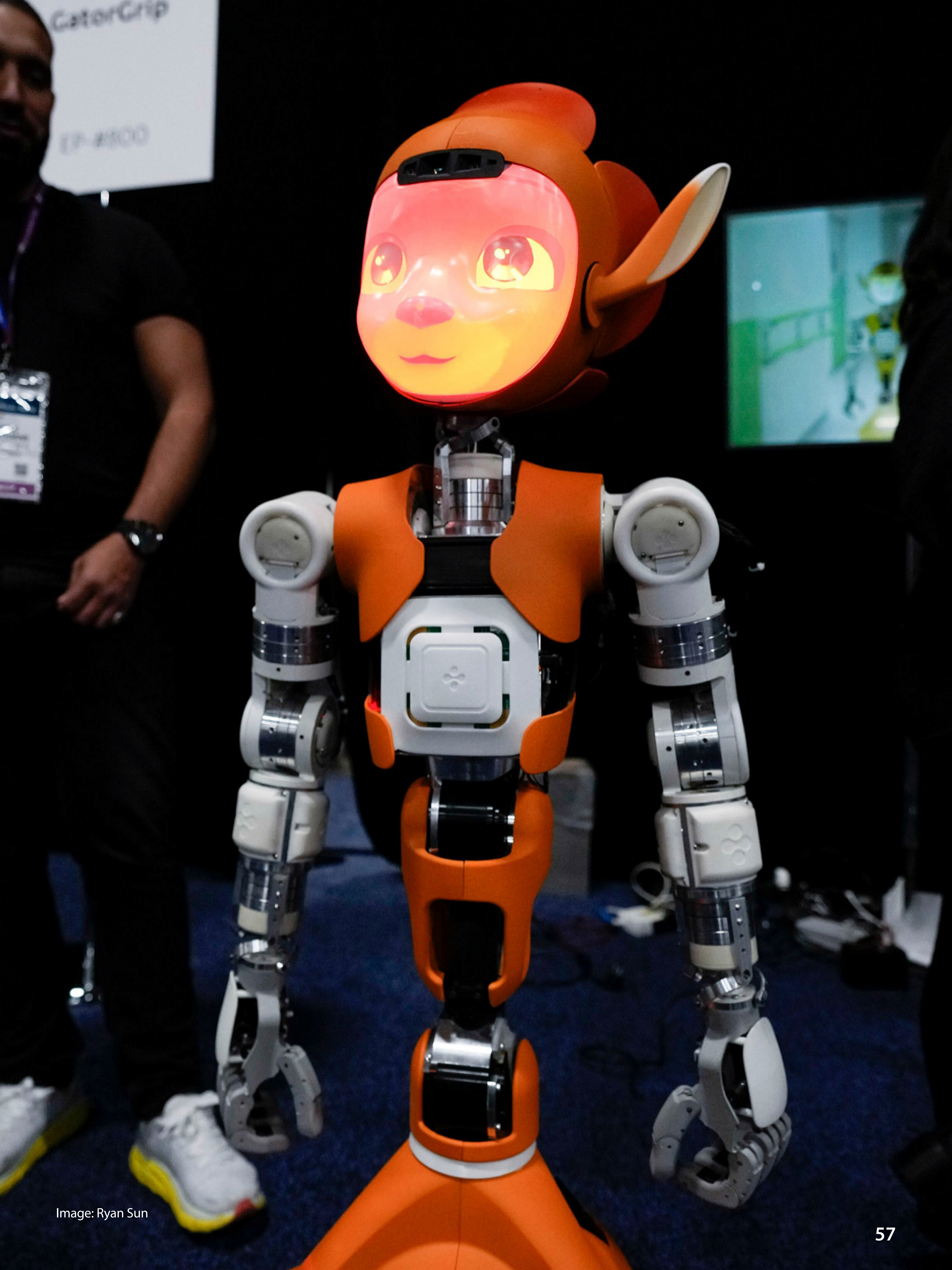
In its latest contract, the union cushioned its so-called safety net for workers, winning $2,000 in severance pay for each year worked if a job is eliminated by tech or AI, as well as the option to try to move to a different department within the company.

Pappageorge said they had to "develop new language" that protected workers both from today's technology and "technology that we don't even know is coming."

"This idea that technology, robotics and artificial intelligence is just running wild with no control at all can do incredible damage," Pappageorge said. "So what we have to do is get ahead of the curve, and CES is where it's at."

More than 100 union members attended the trade show this week to scope out emerging tech that could put more casino jobs at risk.

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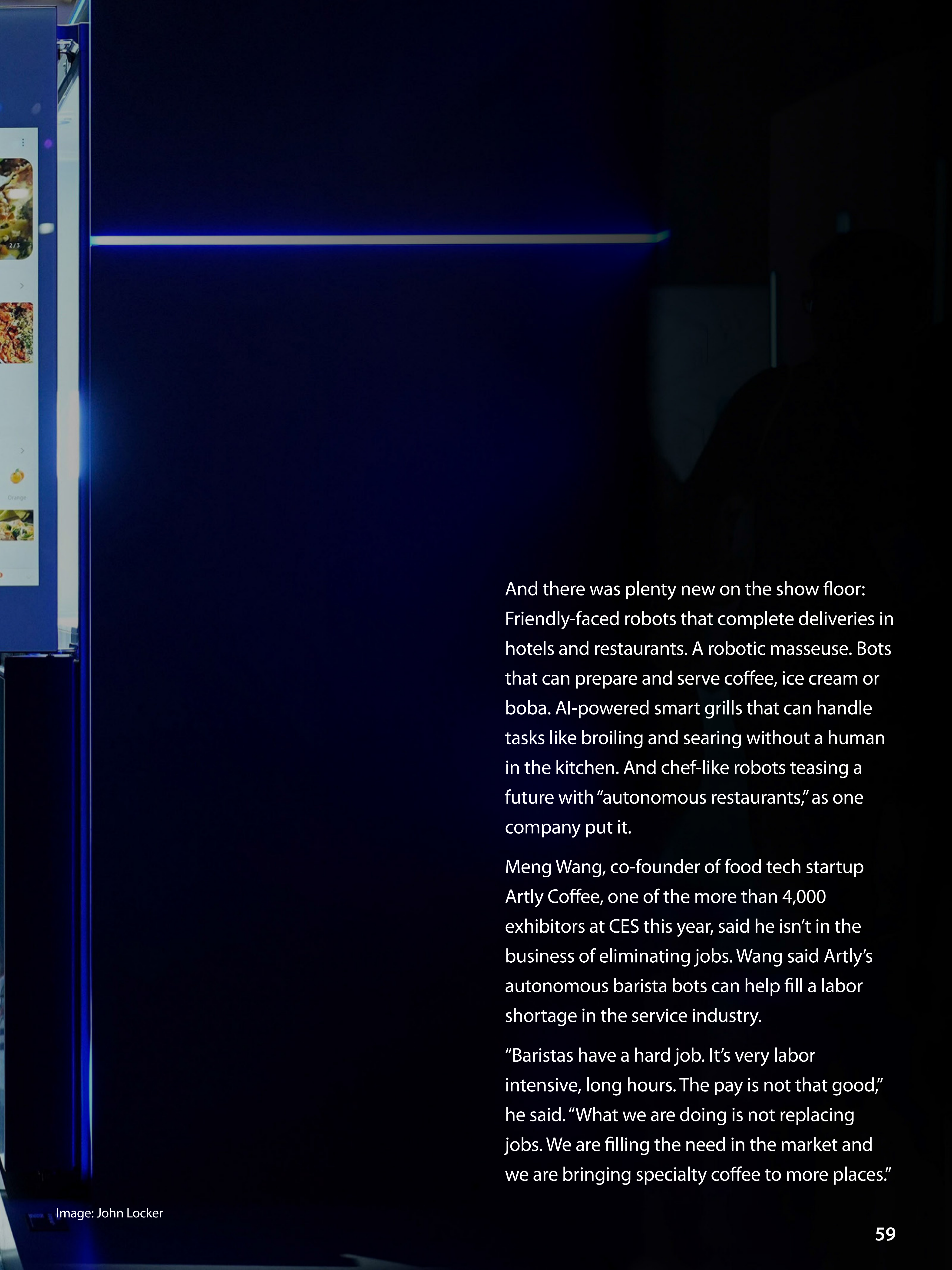

Image: John Locker

And there was plenty new on the show floor: Friendly-faced robots that complete deliveries in hotels and restaurants. A robotic masseuse. Bots that can prepare and serve coffee, ice cream or boba. AI-powered smart grills that can handle tasks like broiling and searing without a human in the kitchen. And chef-like robots teasing a future with "autonomous restaurants," as one company put it.

Meng Wang, co-founder of food tech startup Artly Coffee, one of the more than 4,000 exhibitors at CES this year, said he isn't in the business of eliminating jobs. Wang said Artly's autonomous barista bots can help fill a labor shortage in the service industry.

"Baristas have a hard job. It's very labor intensive, long hours. The pay is not that good," he said. "What we are doing is not replacing jobs. We are filling the need in the market and we are bringing specialty coffee to more places."

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Image: Ryan Sun

But Werner said AI poses a real threat to casino union jobs that don’t require face-to-face interaction with customers — housekeeping, food preparation and cooks, for example.

“When the industry doesn’t have to worry about the effect on customer service, then that takes a lot of the risk out of automation,” he said. That’s especially true for a people-pleasing tourist destination like the Las Vegas Strip, where customers expect top-notch service and experiences, including the latest trends in technology.

That makes Las Vegas “a good place to test these things and see how customers react to it,” he said.

The Culinary Union and its members, like Alejo, the barista, acknowledge that the hospitality industry is ever-evolving.

“The innovations are incredible,” Alejo said. “But it is very scary that in today’s world, everything seems to revolve around technology.”

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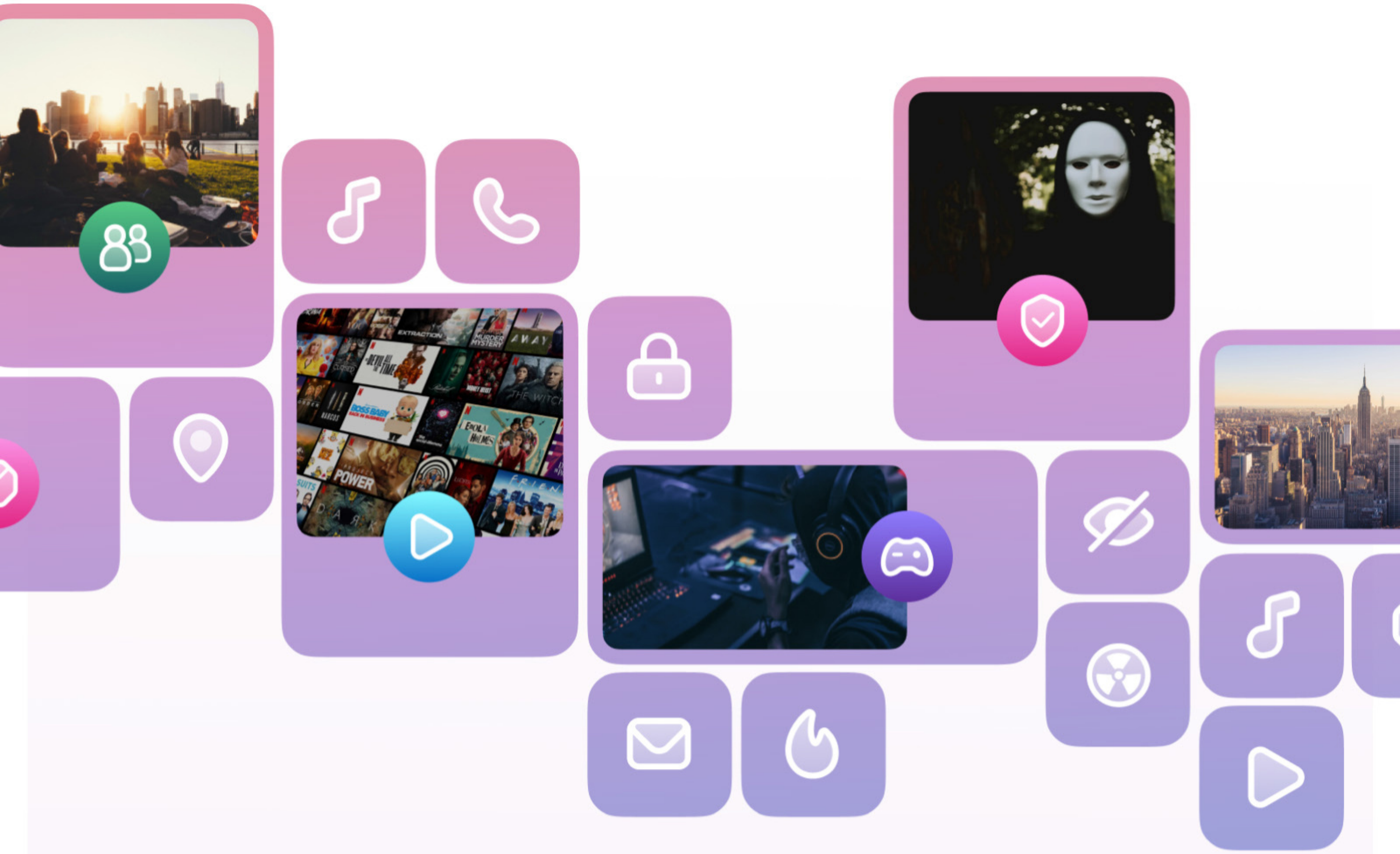

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TECH INNOVATIONS THAT CAUGHT OUR EYE AT CES 2024

ter here.
#CES

From electric cars to transparent TVs to the latest accessibility tech and virtual assistants backed by artificial intelligence, there was a wide range of innovations presented at the CES tech show in Las Vegas last week. The best of it aimed to solve big real-world problems. Some of it aimed to make your life more fun. And some of it was just a little out there.

Experts spent last week combing cavernous exhibit halls for the most exciting, interesting and unusual tech innovations.

Here's what caught our eye at CES 2024.

CES
Consumer Technology Association
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2024

Image: John Locker

S-A2

Image: John Locker

ACCESSIBILITY PRODUCTS WERE BIG ON HOPE

At a conference where excess and opulence manifested itself in nearly everything, it was encouraging to see how much progress has been made toward developing assistive technologies for the disabled.

Boston-based GyroGear, a medical tech startup, debuted a hand-stabilizing glove at CES 2024 that it hopes will help Parkinson's patients and those with hand tremors regain control of their lives. Dutch startup Whispp is using audio-to-audio-based AI to give people with vocal impairments a chance to have real-time conversations in their own natural voices. OrCam introduced a host of devices designed to help those with hearing loss deal with auditory overload. And Sony reserved some prime space in its booth to showcase its Access controller for PlayStation.

MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NEARLY EVERYTHING

Using software and AI to achieve inter-device connections between smart devices, your home and even your car was central to many of the biggest tech companies at CES 2024.

Samsung's new "AI for all" mantra meant integrating its smart home devices and appliances to perform tasks in unison — like the act of recipe selection automatically pre-heating your oven. The South Korean tech giant also announced a collaboration with Hyundai to develop "home-to-car" and "car-to-home" services for all Kia and Hyundai vehicles. Google

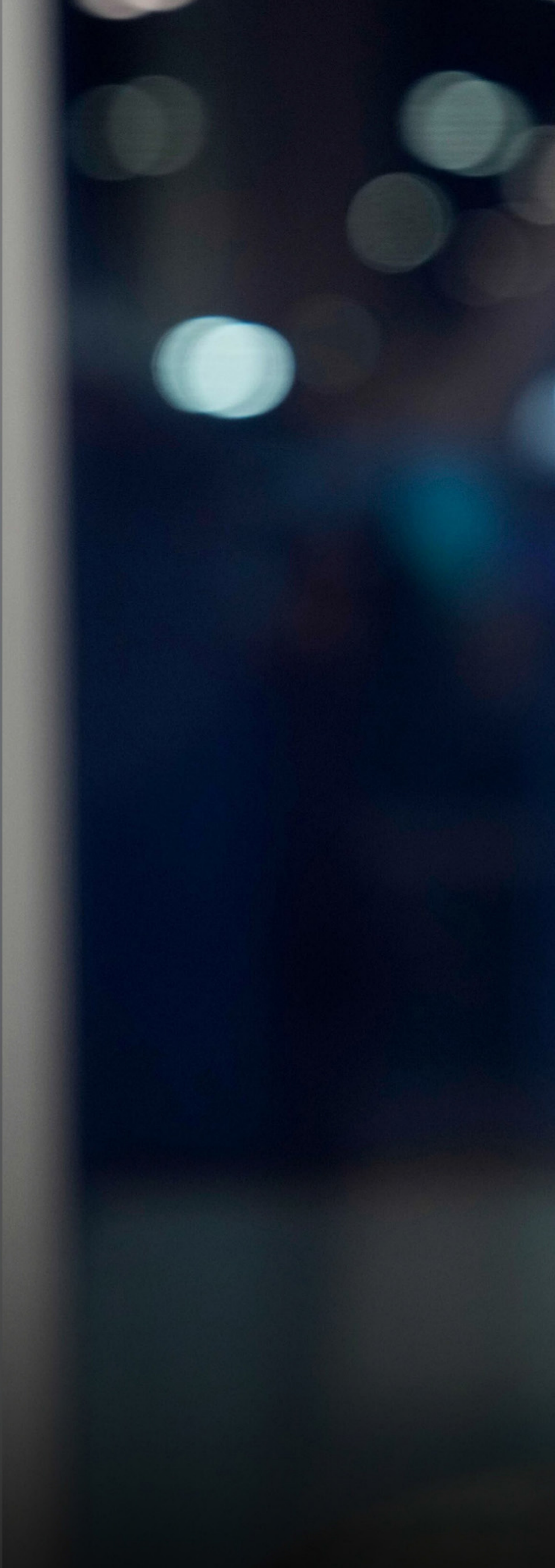


Image: John Locker

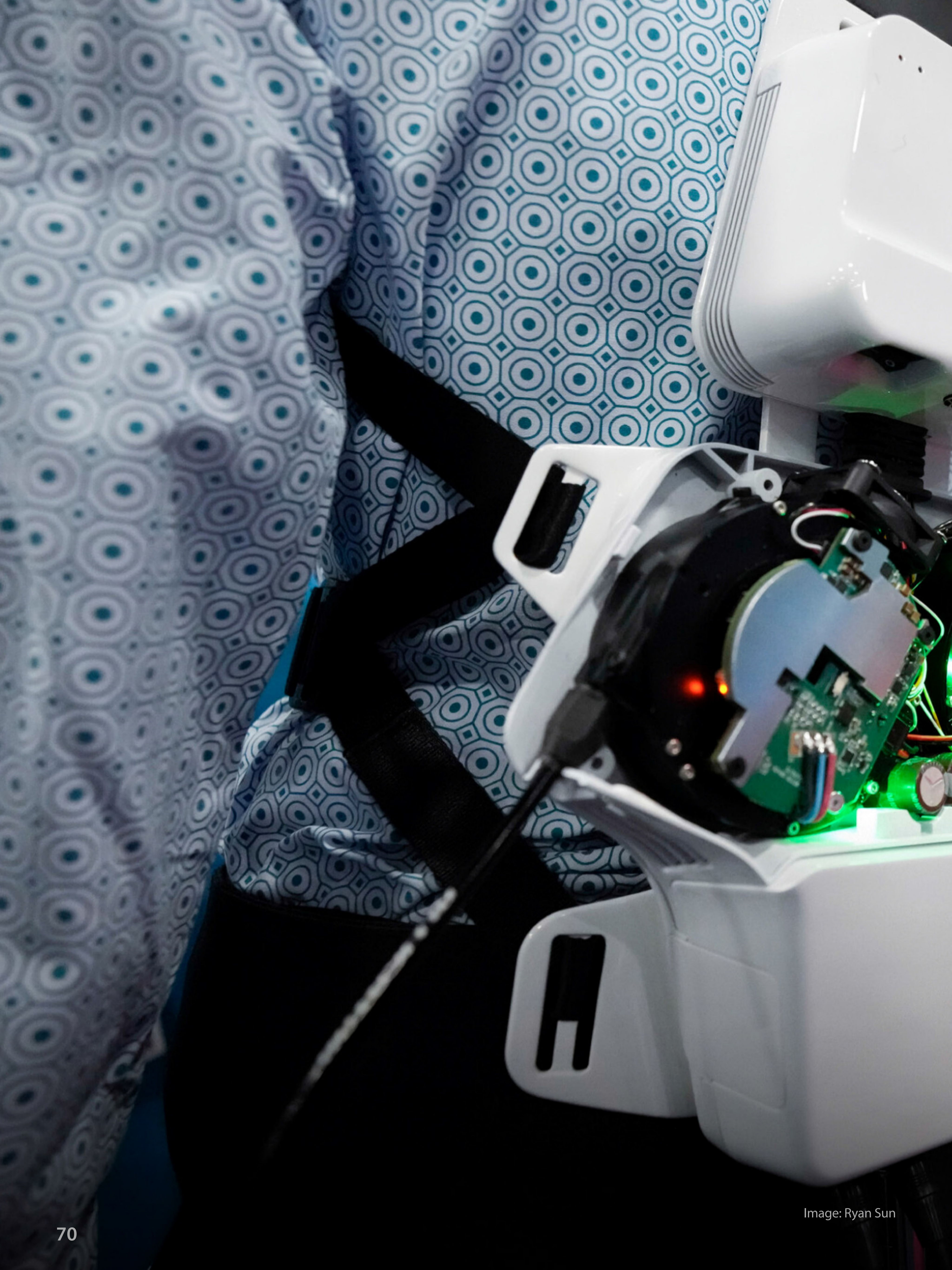
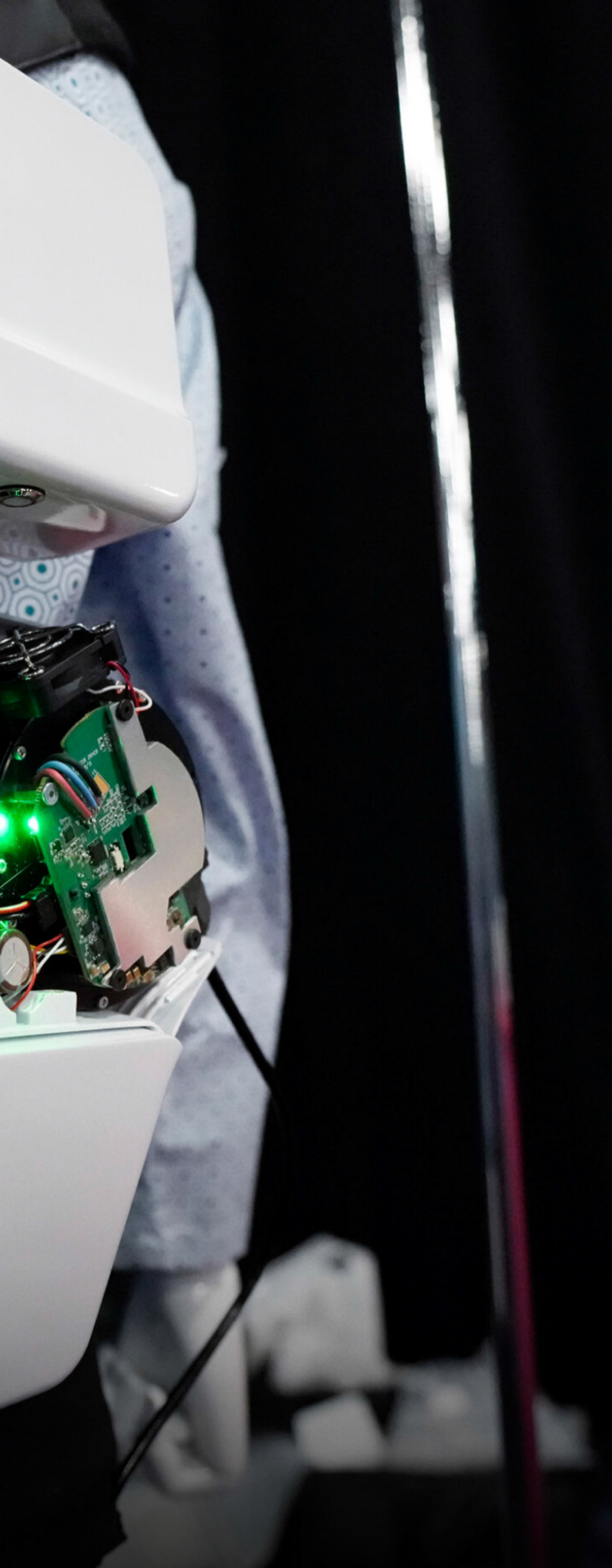


Image: Ryan Sun



is expanding Chromecast to more apps and devices. And Amazon endorsed the Matter casting standard to create more inter-operability between smart devices.

Meanwhile, Mercedes-Benz unveiled a new AI-powered virtual assistant to personalize interactions between drivers and their cars.

VEHICLES ADVANCES WERE ON FULL DISPLAY

CES 2024 was brimming with new electric vehicles, remote construction vehicles, hydrogen engines and other mobility advances.

Honda premiered two concept cars, dubbed the "Saloon" and "Space-Hub," for a new global EV series. Kia decided to go modular with a trio of electric vans that can quickly swap body modules to change their functionality. And Vietnam-based electric upstart VinFast unveiled an electric truck concept.

Bosch Mobility and Hyundai both doubled down on hydrogen as an energy solution. And Hyundai showcased its AI-based autonomous construction excavator.

Image: Ryan Sun

Image: Ryan Sun

HOPE YOU’RE HUNGRY

Chef-like robots, AI-powered appliances and other high-tech kitchen gadgets are holding out the promise that humans don’t need to cook — or mix drinks — for themselves anymore.

GE wants you to start smoke food indoors, while generative AI is powering a Brisk smart grill that aims to make the art of barbecuing foolproof.

Freezing your own ice cream at home takes hours, but ColdSnap’s new ice cream machine prepares your frozen treat in two minutes. And Bartesian’s cocktail-mixing appliance can make as many as 60 different kinds of drinks for you.

Meanwhile, for much younger consumers (and their parents), Veba Baby’s smart baby bottle monitor tracks the expiration of breast milk and formula. The product — which also serves as a bottle locator — monitors the temperature, when a baby feeds from the bottle, and more to detect freshness. And everything is logged onto an accompanying app.

Image: Ryan Sun

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SONY
SONY
HUROTICS
ALL ON
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SAMSUNG
AI for A
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Nikon

Image: Bridget Bennet

WHAT'S NEW ON TV?

OLED, Micro LED, 8k ... what does it all mean? It means you see an extremely sharp image, but the most interesting TVs on display this CES were barely visible at all.

Consumer electronics giants LG and Samsung unveiled transparent TVs at the show.

Almost invisible when turned off, LG's 77-inch transparent OLED screen can switch between transparent mode and a more traditional black background for regular TV mode. Samsung's transparent MICRO LED-powered display worked in a very similar way, but was on display as a concept.

When not being watched as a traditional TV, both can be used as a digital canvas for showcasing artworks, for instance.

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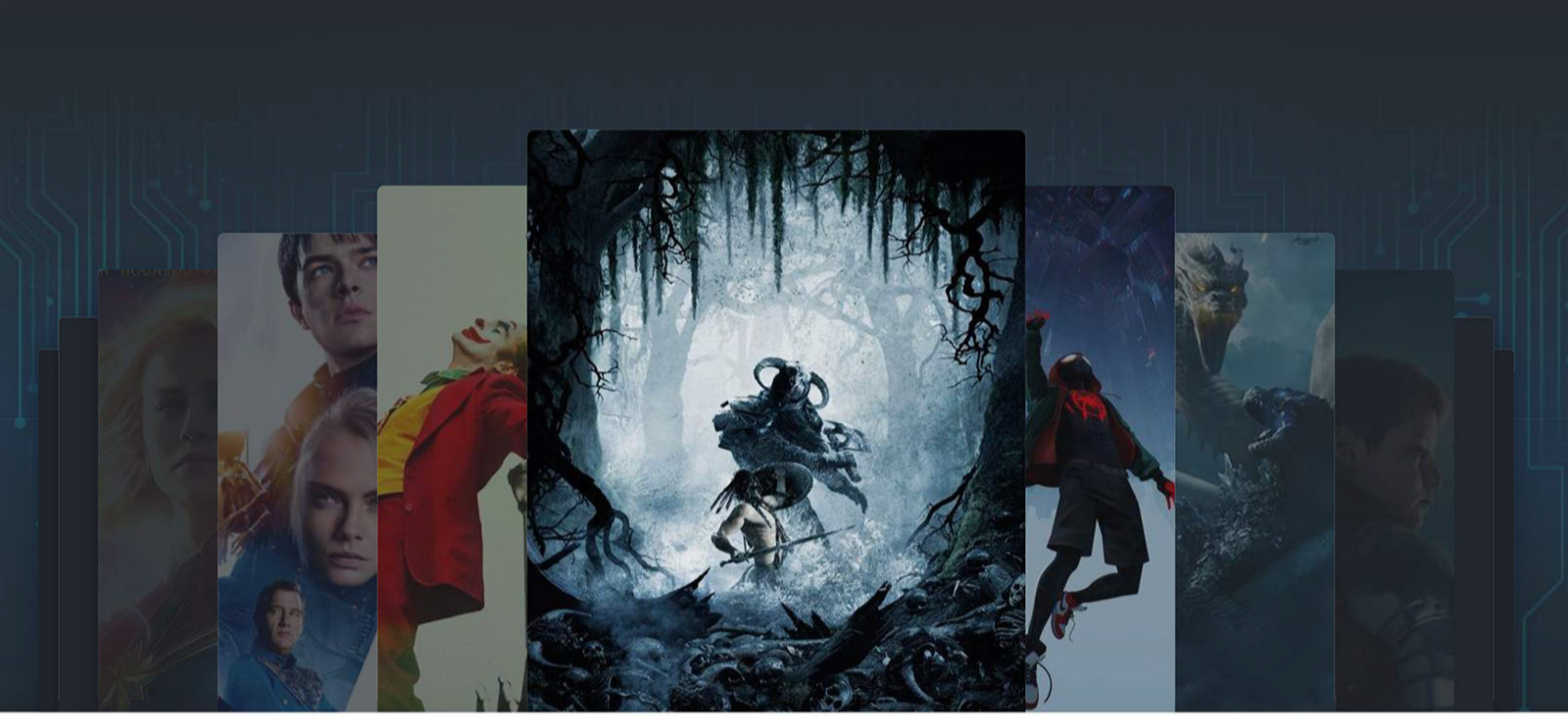

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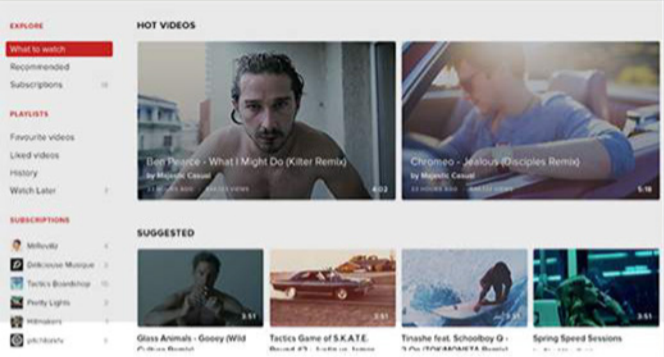
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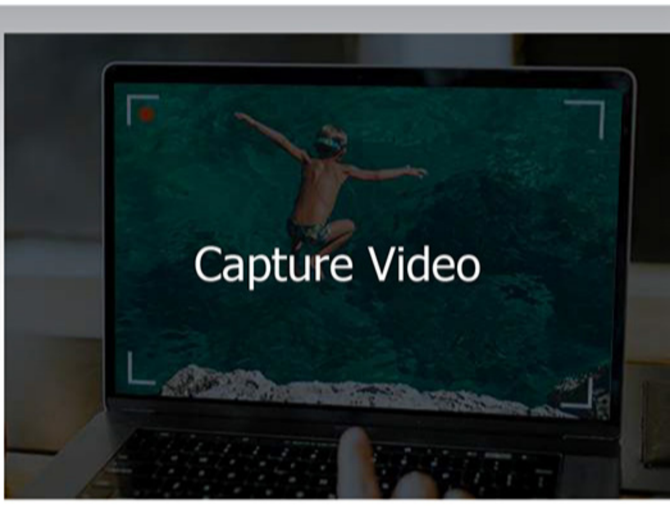

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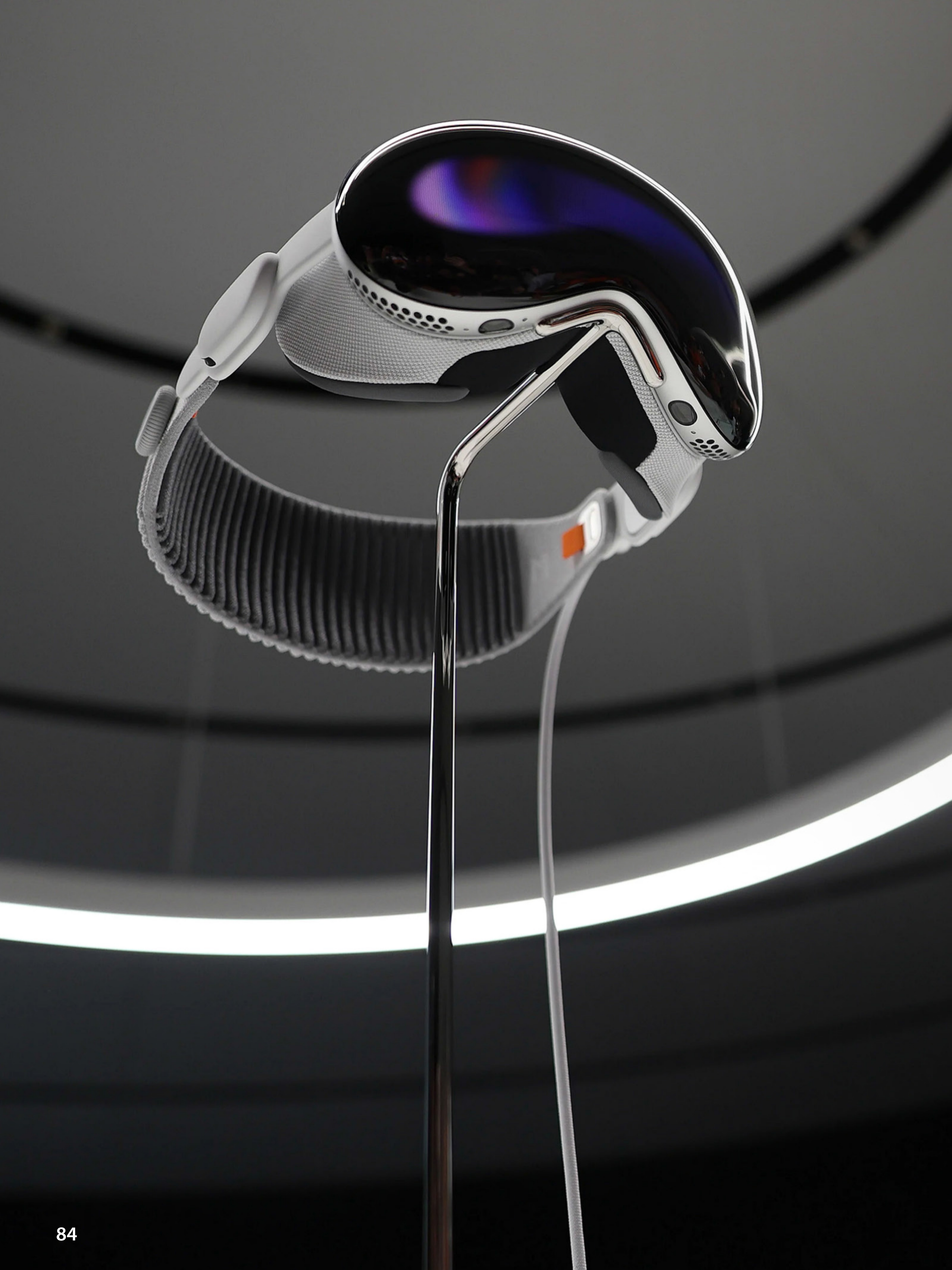
AS NEVER BEFORE: EXPERIENCING VISION PRO DEMOS IN APPLE STORE



The imminent launch of Apple's Vision Pro headset marks a pivotal moment in the company's history and, for the first time, requires a comprehensive presentation and hands-on experience for the average consumer to truly appreciate its capabilities. As we approach the launch day, the anticipation surrounding in-store demos is palpable.

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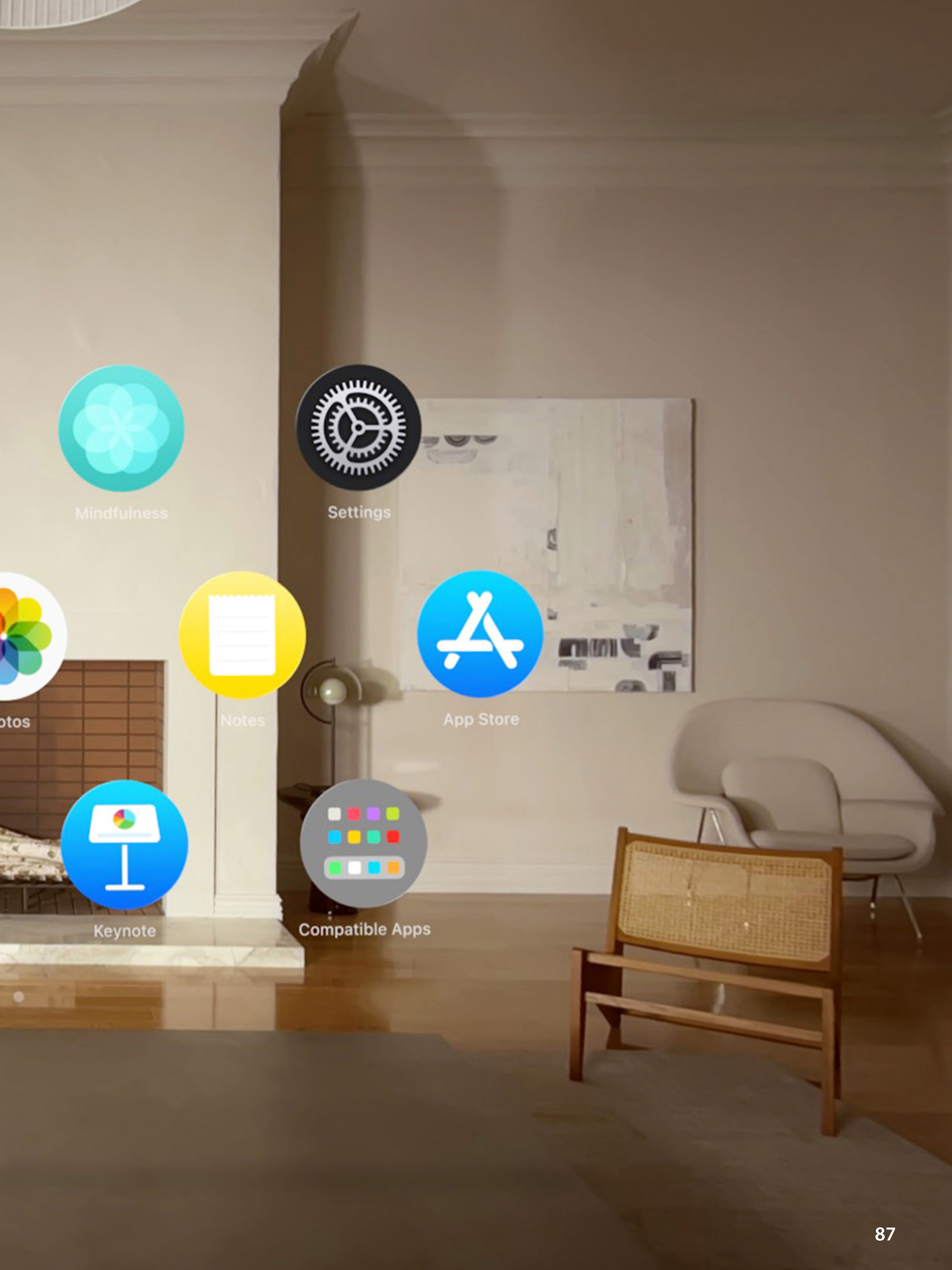
Mindfulness
Settings
otos
Notes
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Keynote
Compatible Apps

A NEW IN-STORE EXPERIENCE

Traditionally, Apple Stores have been the epitome of sleek design and straightforward customer experiences. However, the Vision Pro headset is set to change this dynamic drastically. According to Bloomberg's Mark Gurman, those interested in a demo will undergo a multi-step process, including face scans, custom assembly of the Vision Pro, a detailed walkthrough of the interface and controls, and device calibration, all before a comprehensive 25-minute demonstration. The new experience will form part of the onboarding process for the Vision Pro, which costs $3,499 in the United States and will be a strictly limited edition. According to a report, **Apple is planning to sell between 60,000 and 80,000 units at launch** with consumers likely to be waiting weeks if not months for more stock to be added to Apple's inventory. Given that each new customer will need to book an hour-long appointment with an Apple Store team member, the chances are that the device won't become an overnight sensation.

The Vision Pro is uniquely designed to fit perfectly on its wearer, offering various sizing options for the light seal, foam cushion, and band. Apple is avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach for in-store demos. **Gurman notes that employees will use specialized devices** to scan customers' glasses to determine the appropriate prescription for Vision Pro lenses. This attention to detail is unprecedented and underscores Apple's commitment to a personalized customer experience. Sure, the company is hedging its bets on offering one of the most expensive spatial computing

Madrid
April 29 11:09AM

devices to hit the market, but the truth is that Apple has always differentiated itself from the competition. Cheaper alternatives from the likes of Meta will have mass appeal, whereas the Vision Pro is designed for high-end use cases, and a cheaper alternative is likely to follow in the years ahead. This cheaper model is unlikely to have the same in-store set-up experience that's being offered with the Vision Pro, as Apple would be unable to scale the rollout of such technology. If Apple required every customer to attend an Apple Store for a one-to-one onboarding process for every iPhone or Apple Watch it sold, there's no chance it would be one of the world's most successful companies in 2024.

As part of the Apple Vision Pro rollout, **some stores will boast at least a dozen Vision Pro headsets for customer trials.** The demo includes experiencing normal, panorama, and spatial photos, spatial videos, immersive experiences, and a preview of using the Vision Pro as a computer. Sign-ups for these sessions start early, reflecting the expected high demand.

Buying a Vision Pro is set to be much simpler than the demo experience. Face scans are still a prerequisite, ensuring a perfect fit for every customer. These scans are crucial for both in-store and online orders. Post-scan, all the right components are boxed up and ready for the customer. The stores will also house several display-only units for those who wish to browse merely, but experts anticipate that these display units will face long lines, and Apple may even introduce a new virtual queuing system to allow interested parties to try on a Vision Pro before they purchase one. How long this virtual

queue might last remains to be seen, but with such a high price tag, you can be sure that people will want to know what they're buying before they hand over their cash. That is, aside from YouTubers and professional creators.

A HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

As reported by Malak Saleh, **pre-ordering the Vision Pro requires a Face ID scan** using an iPhone or iPad. This step ensures a precise band fit for the headset. Additionally, those who wear glasses must have their prescription ready to order optical inserts for the headset. Apple has already announced that it will be **selling a prescription product for the Vision Pro from just $149,** which is less than experts were predicting considering the high price tag of the unit. Other accessories are **also expected to be available at launch both in-store and online,** such as additional batteries, longer cables, cleaning accessories, and much more.

The Vision Pro is more than just a VR device. Its capabilities extend to providing 3D visuals, a VR screen, and a speaker system, and eventually, it will serve as a tool for connecting people in virtual worlds like Horizon Worlds. At launch, users will have access to games on the App Store, including more than 250 titles on Apple Arcade. Some of Apple's most popular titles, such as NBA 2K24 Arcade Edition and Sonic Dream Team, will be available, alongside Game Room, What the Golf?, and Super Fruit Ninja. But gaming is only a small part of the Apple Vision Pro experience - the platform "brings a new dimension to powerful, personal computing by changing the way users interact with their apps." visionOS is built upon existing developer frameworks, meaning that more

than one million familiar apps across iOS and iPadOS are available on Apple Vision Pro and automatically work with the new input system. At launch, key productivity and collaboration apps like Fantastical, Freeform, JigSpace, **apps from Microsoft 365, and Slack will be available** making the product ideal for multitasking, and with support for **Magic Keyboard and Magic Trackpad,** users can create the perfect workspace. Apple Vision Pro also features ultra-high-resolution displays, meaning users can watch movies and TV shows from Apple TV+, Disney+, Max, and other services on a screen that feels 100 feet wide with support for HDR content. The chances are that many more use cases for the Vision Pro **will appear in the months and years ahead, too,** for both professionals and consumers.

Speaking of the launch of the new device, Tim Cook, Apple CEO, said: "The era of spatial computing has arrived. Apple Vision Pro is the most advanced consumer electronics device ever created. Its revolutionary and magical user interface will redefine how we connect, create, and explore." Starting at around $3,499, the Vision Pro is a premium product. Its availability in stores for demos on the launch date is a strategic move by Apple, aiming to bridge the gap between high-end technology and customer understanding.

escadero
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The Vision Pro is a testament to Apple's innovation and its ability to redefine customer experiences. From the meticulous personalization in the fitting process to the immersive demo experiences, Apple is setting a new standard in technology retail and we can't wait to see what the company does next!

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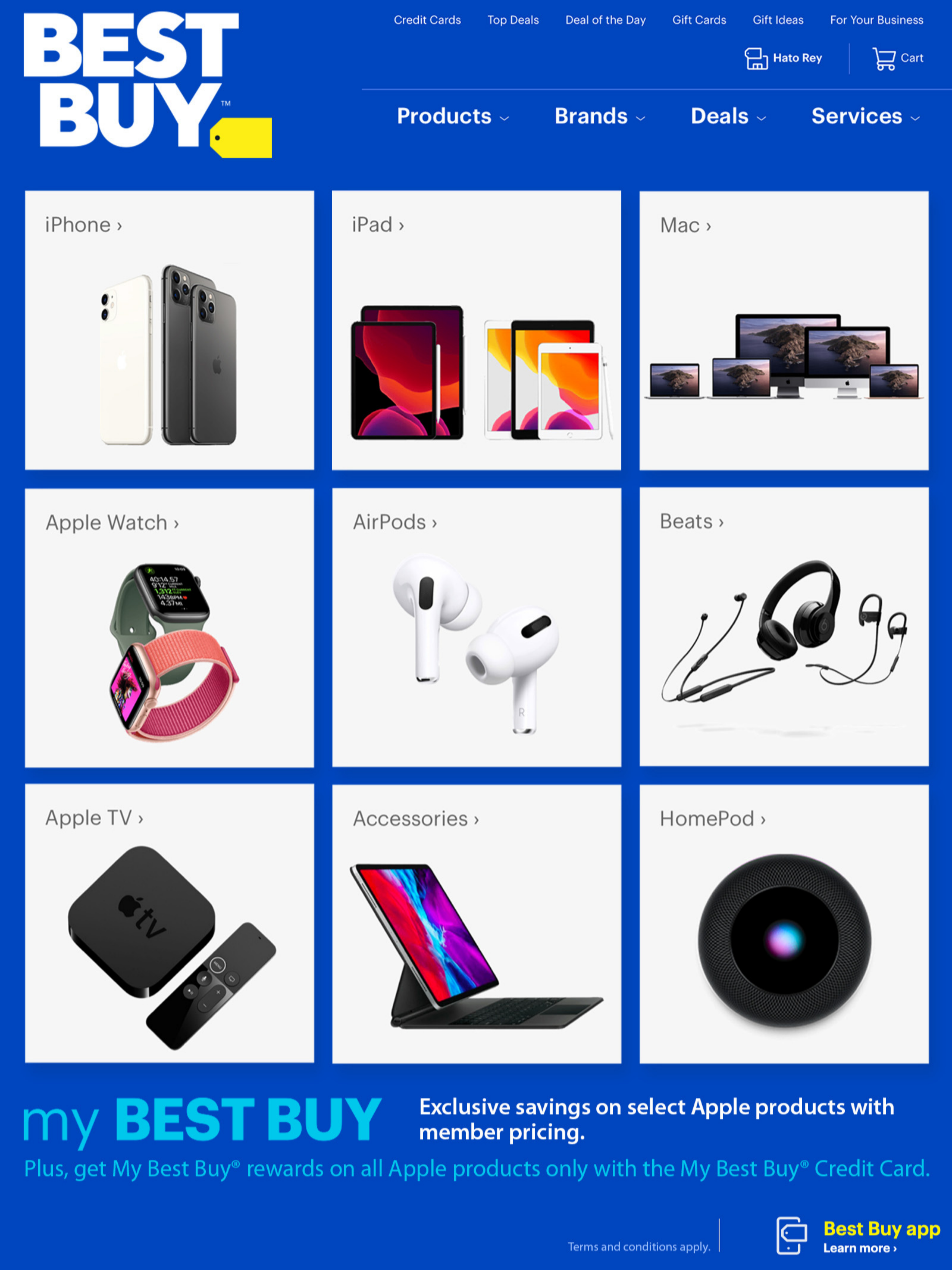

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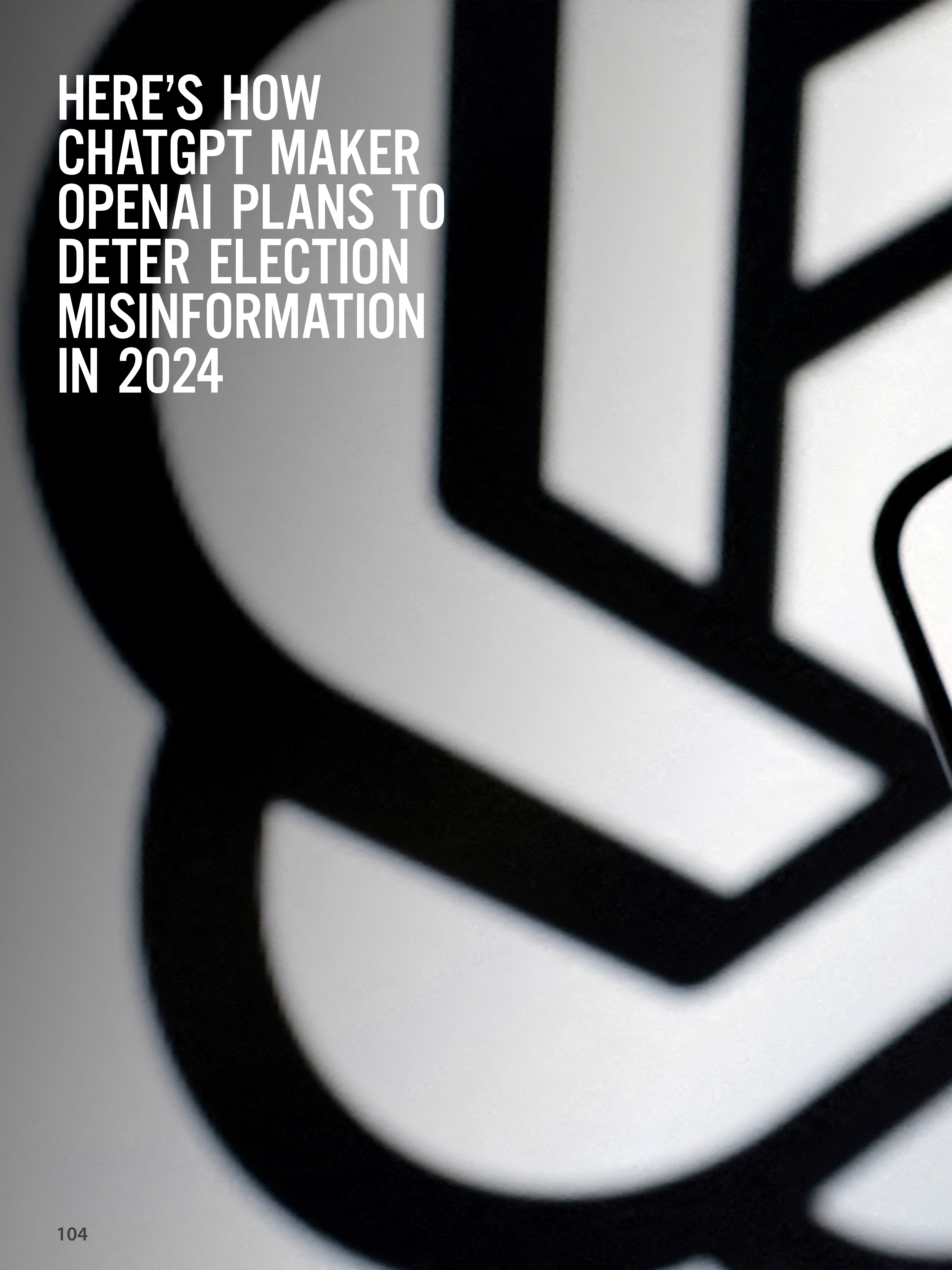


HERE'S HOW CHATGPT MAKER OPENAI PLANS TO DETER ELECTION MISINFORMATION IN 2024

ChatGPT

Cha
Examples
"Explain quantum computing i
simple terms" →
"Got any creative ideas for a 1
year old's birthday?" →
"How do I make an HTTP reque
in Javascript?" →
Ope

ChatGPT maker OpenAI has outlined a plan to prevent its tools from being used to spread election misinformation as voters in more than 50 countries prepare to cast their ballots in national elections this year.

The safeguards spelled out by the San Francisco-based artificial intelligence startup in a blog post this week include a mix of preexisting policies and newer initiatives to prevent the misuse of its wildly popular generative AI tools. They can create novel text and images in seconds but also be weaponized to concoct misleading messages or convincing fake photographs.

The steps will apply specifically to OpenAI, only one player in an expanding universe of companies developing advanced generative AI tools. The company, which announced the moves this week, said it plans to "continue our platform safety work by elevating accurate voting information, enforcing measured policies, and improving transparency."

It said it will ban people from using its technology to create chatbots that impersonate real candidates or governments, to misrepresent how voting works or to discourage people from voting. It said that until more research can be done on the persuasive power of its technology, it won't allow its users to build applications for the purposes of political campaigning or lobbying.

Starting "early this year," OpenAI said, it will digitally watermark AI images created using its DALL-E image generator. This will permanently mark the content with information about its origin, making it easier to identify whether an image that appears elsewhere on the web was created using the AI tool.

The company also said it is partnering with the National Association of Secretaries of State to steer ChatGPT users who ask logistical questions about voting to accurate information on that group's nonpartisan website, CanIVote.org.

Mekela Panditharatne, counsel in the democracy program at the Brennan Center for Justice, said OpenAI's plans are a positive step toward combating election misinformation, but it will depend on how they are implemented.

"For example, how exhaustive and comprehensive will the filters be when flagging questions about the election process?" she said. "Will there be items that slip through the cracks?"

OpenAI's ChatGPT and DALL-E are some of the most powerful generative AI tools to date. But there are many companies with similarly sophisticated technology that don't have as many election misinformation safeguards in place.

While some social media companies, such as YouTube and Meta, have introduced AI labeling policies, it remains to be seen whether they will be able to consistently catch violators.

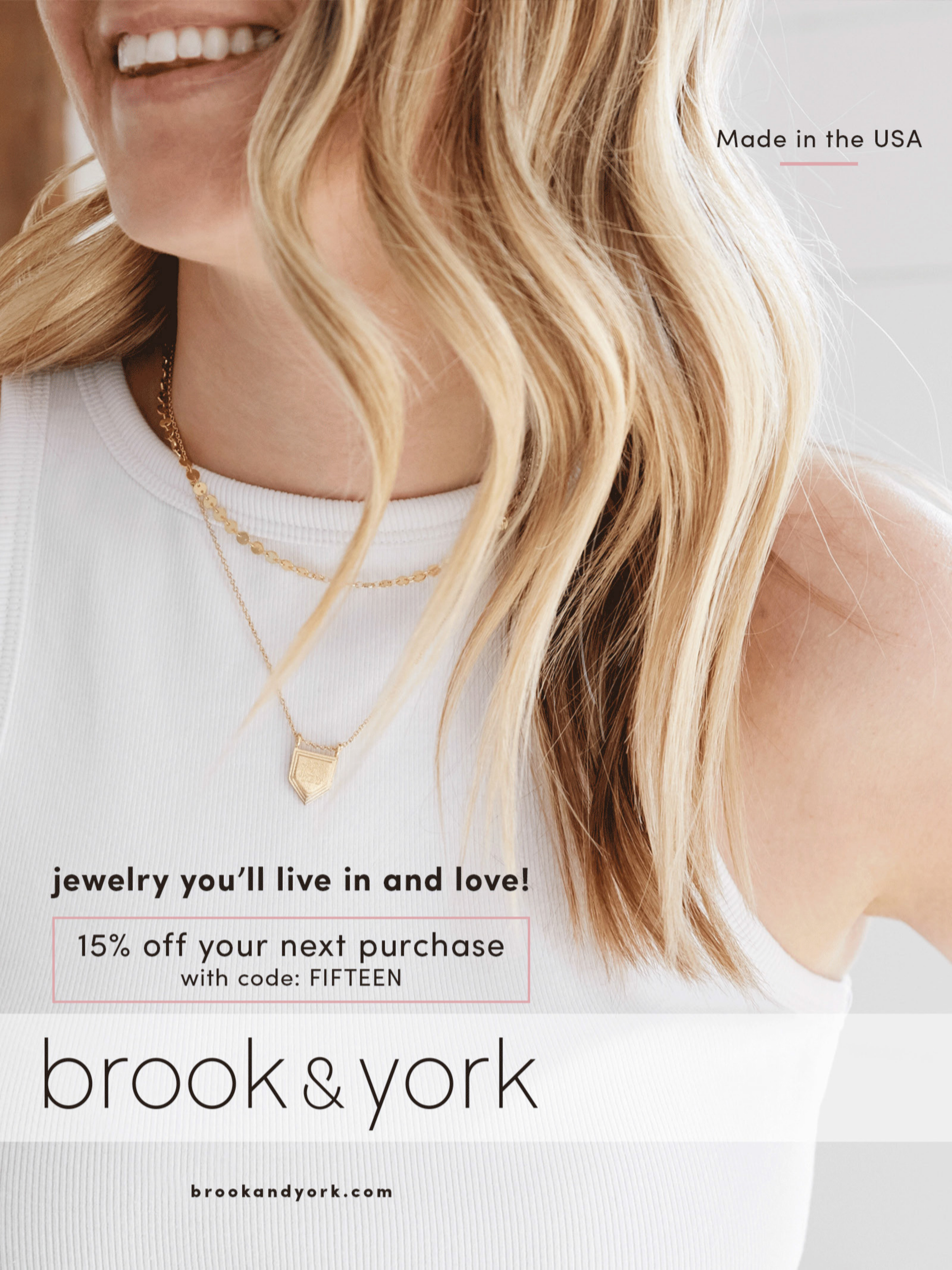
"It would be helpful if other generative AI firms adopted similar guidelines so there could be industry-wide enforcement of practical rules," said Darrell West, senior fellow in the Brooking Institution's Center for Technology Innovation.

Without voluntary adoption of such policies across the industry, regulating AI-generated disinformation in politics would require

legislation. In the U.S., Congress has yet to pass legislation seeking to regulate the industry's role in politics despite some bipartisan support. Meanwhile, more than a third of U.S. states have passed or introduced bills to address deepfakes in political campaigns as federal legislation stalls.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said that even with all of his company's safeguards in place, his mind is not at ease.

"I think it's good we have a lot of anxiety and are going to do everything we can to get it as right as we can," he said during an interview at a Bloomberg event during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "We're going to have to watch this incredibly closely this year. Super tight monitoring. Super tight feedback loop."



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AS A NEW GENERATION RISES, TENSION BETWEEN FREE SPEECH AND INCLUSIVITY ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES SIMMERS

BASCOM HALL

Generations of Americans have held firm to a version of free speech that makes room for even the vilest of views. It's girded by a belief that the good ideas rise above the bad, that no one should be punished for voicing an idea — except in rare cases where the idea could lead directly to illegal action.

Today, that idea faces competition more forceful and vehement than it has seen for a century.

On college campuses, a newer version of free speech is emerging as young generations

Image: Morry Gash

redraw the line where expression crosses into harm. There's a wave of students who have no tolerance for speech that marginalizes. They draw lines around language that leads to damage, either psychological or physical. Their judgments weigh the Constitution but also incorporate histories of privilege and oppression.

"We believe in a diverse set of thoughts," says Kaleb Autman, a Black student at the University of Wisconsin whose group is demanding a zero-tolerance policy on hate speech. "But when your thought is predicated on the subjugation of me or my people, or to a generalized people, then we have problems."

NEW GENERATION, EVOLVING IDEAS

A new understanding of free speech has been evolving on college campuses for years, marked by the introduction of safe spaces, trigger warnings and a rise in disruptive protests that silence speakers with offensive views. But the Israel-Hamas war and its rhetoric appear to be widening the fault lines and pushing students to demand that university leaders take a side between clashing versions of free speech.

It came to a head in December when leaders of three elite colleges were called to Congress to testify on campus antisemitism. With legalistic flourish, they took a stand for free expression as the Constitution and decades of case law define it, then faced weeks of backlash as opponents called them soft on antisemitism.

The fallout contributed to the Jan. 2 resignation of Harvard University President Claudine Gay, who faced mounting allegations of plagiarism that surfaced after the hearing. Her resignation

Image: Mark Schiefelbein

Image: Steven Senne

followed the December ouster of Liz Magill of the University of Pennsylvania, who shifted her position on campus free speech amid the blowback.

Asked on Capitol Hill about balancing free speech and the safety of Jewish students, Magill told lawmakers that Penn's approach is "guided by the United States Constitution, which allows for robust perspectives." A day later, amid pressure from donors, she said Penn's policies needed to be "clarified and evaluated."

She suggested rules rooted in the Constitution don't do enough to protect students in a world with "signs of hate proliferating across our campus and our world in a way not seen in years."

Campuses across the nation have confronted similar tensions amid rising antisemitism and Islamophobia. Debate has raged over whether to police phrases such as "from the river to the sea" and "intifada" — often used as pro-Palestinian chants but lately also seen by some as calls for the genocide of Jews. Columbia University is among several institutions that recently suspended pro-Palestinian student groups, citing their "threatening rhetoric and intimidation."

Those types of phrases, however some perceive them, are "clearly constitutionally protected," says Erwin Chemerinsky, a law scholar and dean of the law school at the University of California, Berkeley, which was the cradle of the free speech movement in the 1960s. Yet on all sides of the issue, he says, today's students want to quash speech they don't like, regardless of its legality.

"What I always hear now is how, when students are upset or offended, they phrase it as, 'I feel unsafe.' And I think it's so important that we separate out the campus' duty," he says. "It's not our role to make them safe from ideas that they don't want exposed to. But that line, I think, has gotten blurred."

Yet as the U.S. Education Department opens dozens of federal civil rights inquiries around antisemitism and Islamophobia, college leaders face pressure to counter hateful speech even if it's constitutionally protected, Howard Gillman, chancellor of the University of California, Irvine, said during a panel on campus free speech last week.

Says Gillman: "There is increasingly now a sense of obligation on the part of campuses to do something."

DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

The shifting lines have become visible as colleges reach diverging conclusions on hate speech. After the congressional hearing, Stanford University and Cornell University declared that calls for genocide would indeed violate their conduct codes. Chiefs of Harvard and Penn, by contrast, told lawmakers it depended on context. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul told the state's public universities that such a call should face "swift disciplinary action."

Campus officials are being pulled in every direction from donors, alumni, students and politicians. But the latest battle has seen a reversal of sorts in the allegiances over free speech.

Republicans, who have long characterized colleges as liberal hotbeds that stifle free speech, are now calling on those institutions to curb

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E RIGHTEOUS NATION WHICH KEEPETH THE TRUTH
MAY ENTER IN

Image: Steven Senne

speech seen as antisemitic. Colleges previously accused of ceding ground on free speech are suddenly emerging as its strongest defenders.

“The thing that I don’t know is, does anyone really have a principled position on this? Or is it just about the politics?” says Genevieve Lakier, a First Amendment scholar at the University of Chicago. She fears allegations of antisemitism are being used as a weapon to silence pro-Palestinian speech, and the biggest threats come from donors and legislators.

Still, she sees a changing tide on college campuses. Students are increasingly suspicious of free speech arguments they say have been used to empower some and oppress others. Their version of free speech leaves no room for certain racial slurs, Lakier says, and it introduces new rules around pronouns. Amid changing cultural views, certain kinds of language that were once tolerated are now seen as unacceptable, she says. “Except for a few outliers, that is, I don’t think, a bad thing.”

In nearly 20 years as president of Augustana College, Steven Bahls saw the generational change play out. When confronted with speech disputes in the past, he could settle it by applying the Constitution and explaining case law. At some point that wasn’t enough, and emotion came to dominate the debate.

“Students expect the college president to be on their side,” says Bahls, a lawyer by trade. “And you know, you can’t blame them. They’re paying a lot for their education. And to show students that you’re on their side doesn’t mean you have to agree with them politically.”

Image: Kayana Szymczak

ΑΕΠ
Alpha Epsilon Pi

Image: Mary Altaffer

LOOKING AT THE WIDER PICTURE

Today’s moment carries echoes of past speech battles. The rise of shopping malls in the 1970s brought a slew of legal cases asking if mall owners could place constraints on expression on private property that functions as a public space (in general, they can, courts found). And college campuses have faced past battles of their own, including turbulent protests over the Vietnam War and the proliferation of speech codes that aimed to fight hate speech in the 1990s.

To students, it’s a complex question. Max Zimmerman says he is a firm supporter of the First Amendment. But in the aftermath of Oct. 7, he says it’s sometimes scary being a Jewish student at Towson University, near Baltimore. In a campus plaza known as Freedom Square, a public chalkboard meant to encourage civil discourse often displays anti-Israel phrases. Protesters have marched across campus chanting “from the river to the sea.”

“A phrase that has a hidden phrase, like calling for the mass genocide of the Jews, stuff like that shouldn’t be allowed on college campuses,” he says. “There needs to be a limit to what you can say.”

The university referred questions to a campus guide on free expression. It says: “Hateful or offensive speech that does not rise to the level of a true threat or unlawful harassment cannot be banned or punished.” Zimmerman says campus officials have responded by erasing the chalkboard twice a day.

There is no unified push to rewrite the rules of speech, and there’s no consensus among students, but polling reveals a shift. Students have become less likely to see freedom of speech as “extremely important,” and they prioritize inclusivity and free speech at nearly the same levels, according to a 2022 Knight Foundation poll. Black students especially said they were losing confidence that the First Amendment protects students like them, the poll found.

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a coalition of Black students demanded a total ban on hate speech in 2023 after a white student used racial slurs in a video that spread on social media. The university rejected the demand and said it couldn’t punish constitutionally protected speech.

“How are we supposed to be protected by a document that at one point would have allowed for the enslavement of me as a Black person?” says Autman, a senior in legal studies and sociology. “We should not wait for harm or violence to be inflicted for us to combat it.”

Private universities have wider power to limit speech because they aren’t bound by the First Amendment, although most commit to its principles. Public universities can place narrow limits on the time, place and manner of speech. Under federal civil rights law, all are required to take action against speech rising to the level of harassment based on someone’s race, religion or national origin.

For colleges, navigating the minefield of public discourse is trickier than ever. They are caught in the middle: Standing up for offensive speech could draw accusations of antisemitism, and they could be added to

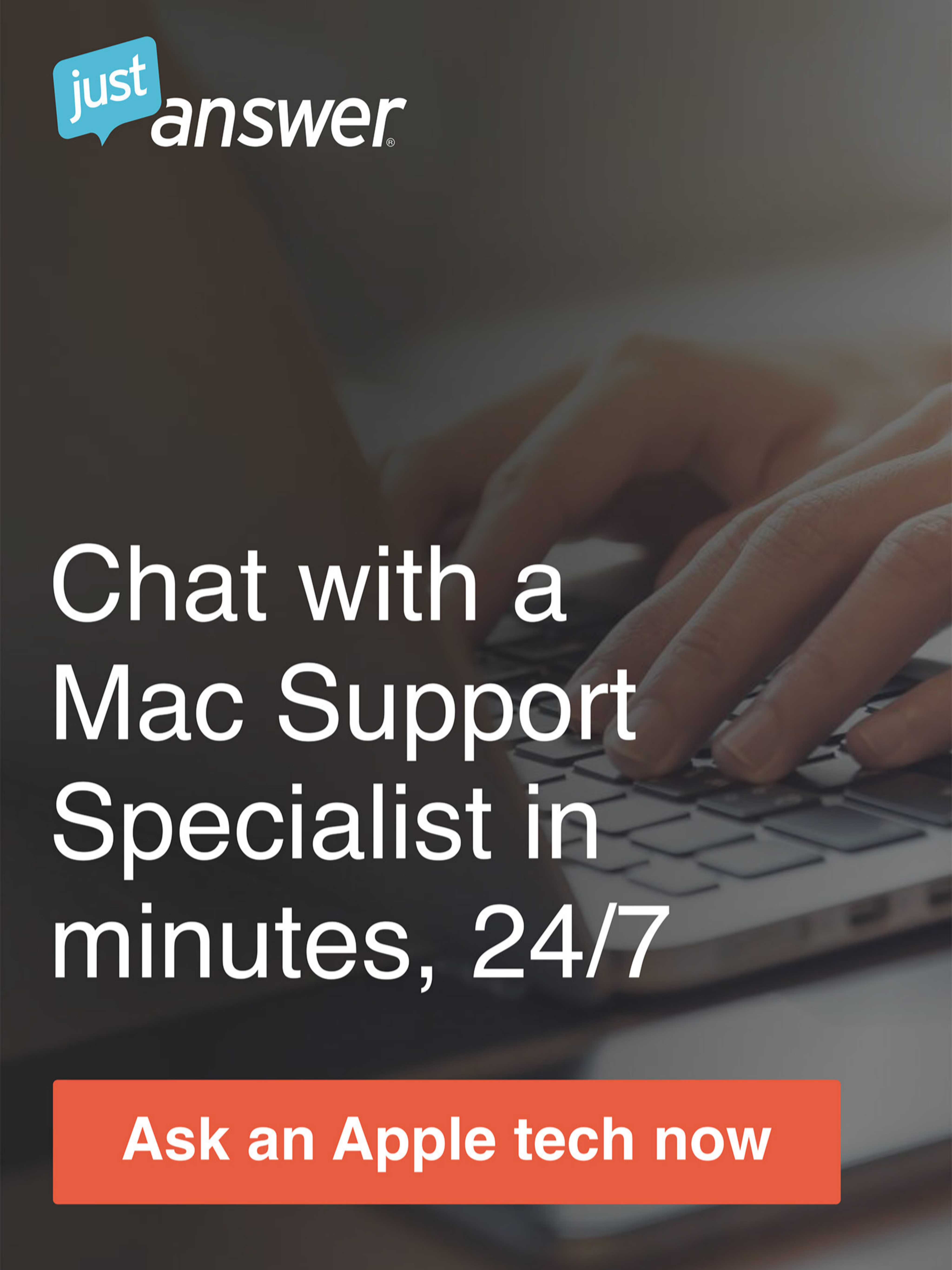
Image: Stephanie Mitchell

the list of schools facing federal civil rights investigations. Adding new limits to speech could bring its own legal challenges and threatens to further erode civil discourse.

William Adams, a former president of Colby College in Maine, says the solution lies somewhere between. The drift away from a classical view on free speech has left even progressive faculty fearful they will be punished for verbal missteps. At the same time, he says, colleges have a duty to meet the changing expectations of an increasingly diverse student body.

“Something has got to really be rearranged in these settings without a return to hard-nosed constitutionalism, because I don’t think that’ll work either,” he says. “We have to get to a place where there isn’t this tension.”

Image: Morry Gash



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BOEING TO INCREASE QUALITY INSPECTIONS ON 737-MAX FOLLOWING ALASKA AIRLINES BLOW OUT

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Boeing told employees this week that it plans to increase quality inspections of its 737 Max 9 aircraft, following the failure of an emergency exit door panel on an Alaska Airlines flight last week.

It is the latest in a series of troubles for Boeing, whose reputation as the premier American aircraft manufacturer has been tarnished by a series of manufacturing flaws that have led some airlines to hold off aircraft purchases or go with its European rival, Airbus.

The inspections come after Federal regulators grounded the 737 Max, and that Boeing has said that after the Alaska Airlines flight and customer complaints, it is "clear that we are not where we need to be" on quality assurance and controls.

"Our team is also taking a hard look at our quality practices in our factories and across our production system," said Stan Deal, the president and CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, in an email to employees.

Boeing is also bringing in airline customers and independent inspectors to go over the aircraft as needed, Deal wrote.

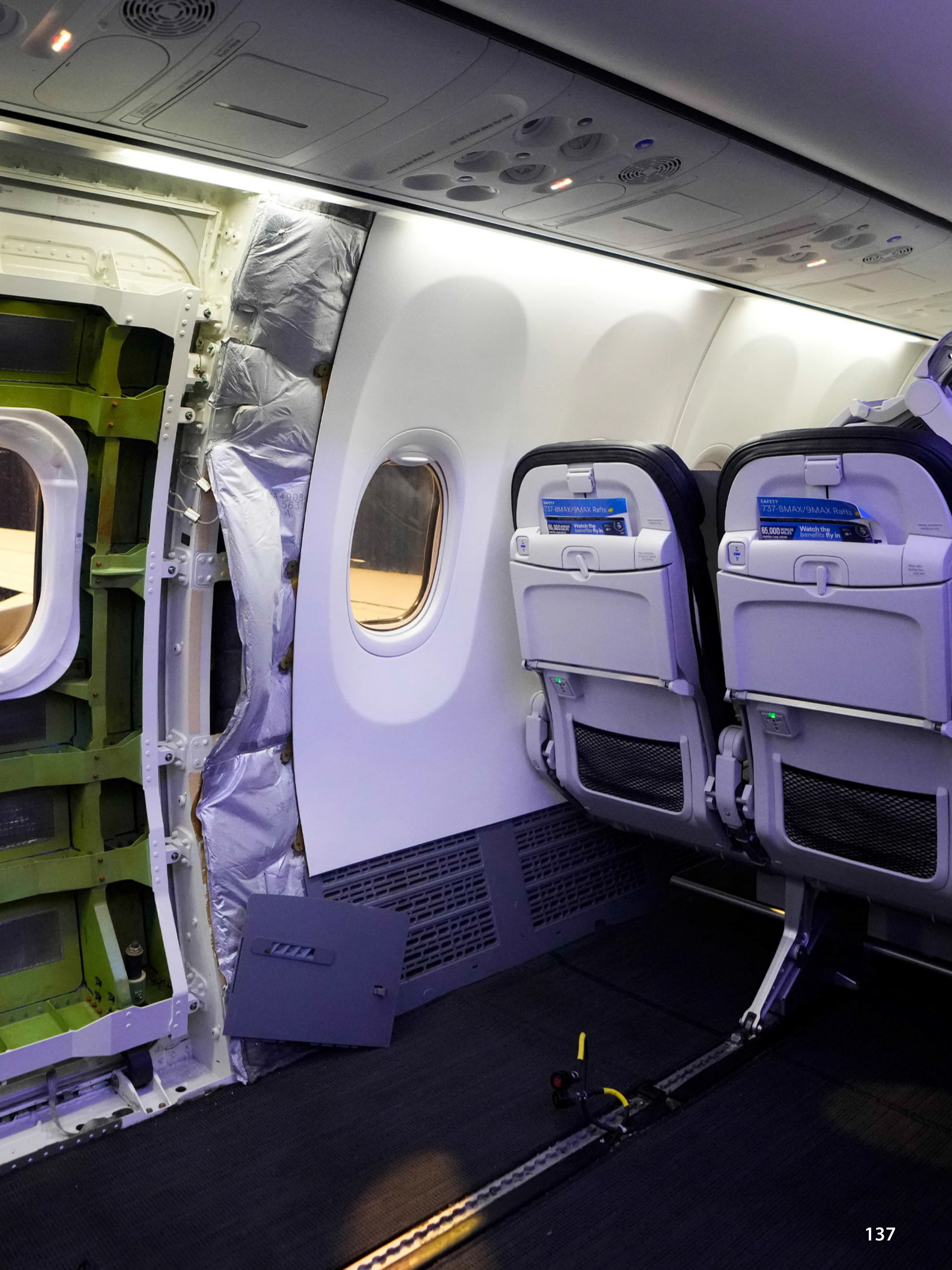
One of two door plugs on an Alaska Max 9 blew out shortly after the plane took off from Portland, Oregon, a week ago, leaving a hole in the plane. The cabin lost pressure and the plane was forced to descend rapidly and return to Portland for an emergency landing. No serious injuries were reported.

Following the incident, Federal Aviation Administration announced last week that it plans an investigation into whether the manufacturer failed to make sure a fuselage panel that blew off was safe and manufactured to meet the design that regulators approved.

The National Transportation Safety Board is focusing its investigation on plugs used to fill spots for extra doors when those exits are not required for safety reasons on Boeing 737 Max 9 jetliners.

The incident on the Alaska plane is the latest in a string of mishaps for Boeing that began in 2018, with the first of two crashes of Max 8 planes in Indonesia and Ethiopia — and more than four months apart — that killed a total of 346 people.

Max 8 and Max 9 planes were grounded worldwide for nearly two years after the second crash. Since then, various manufacturing flaws have at times held up deliveries of Max jets and a larger Boeing plane, the 787. Last month, the company asked airlines to inspect their Max jets for a loose bolt in the rudder-control system.


SAFETY
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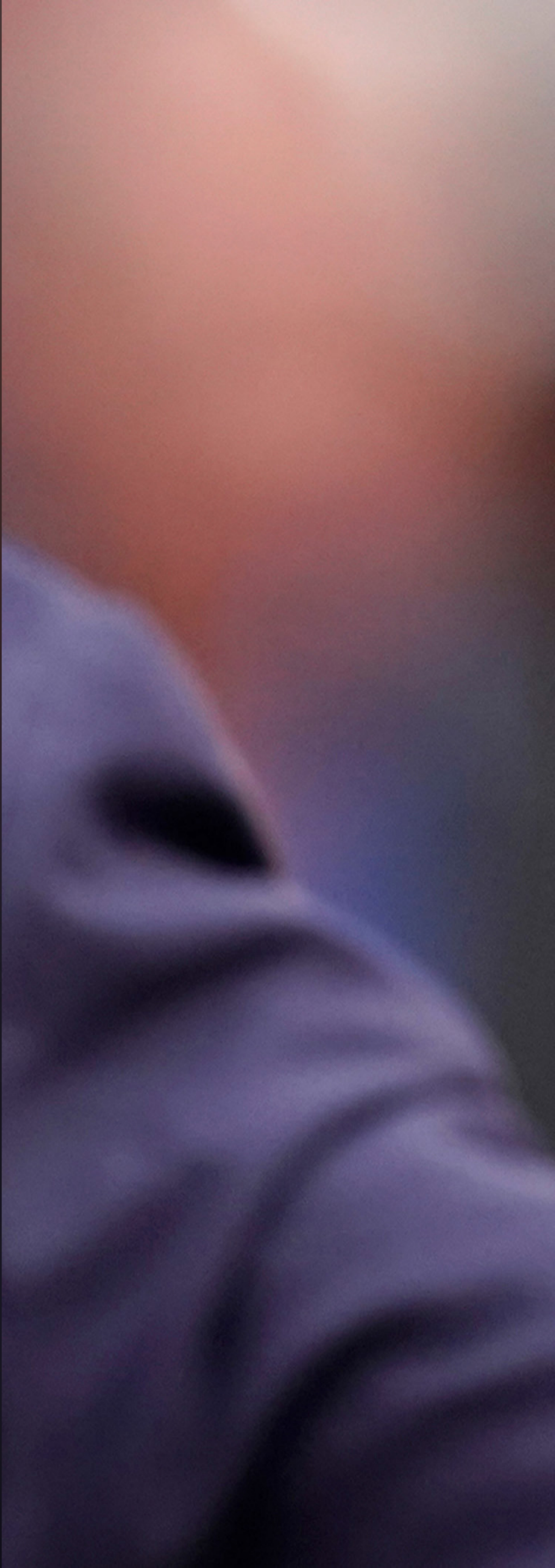
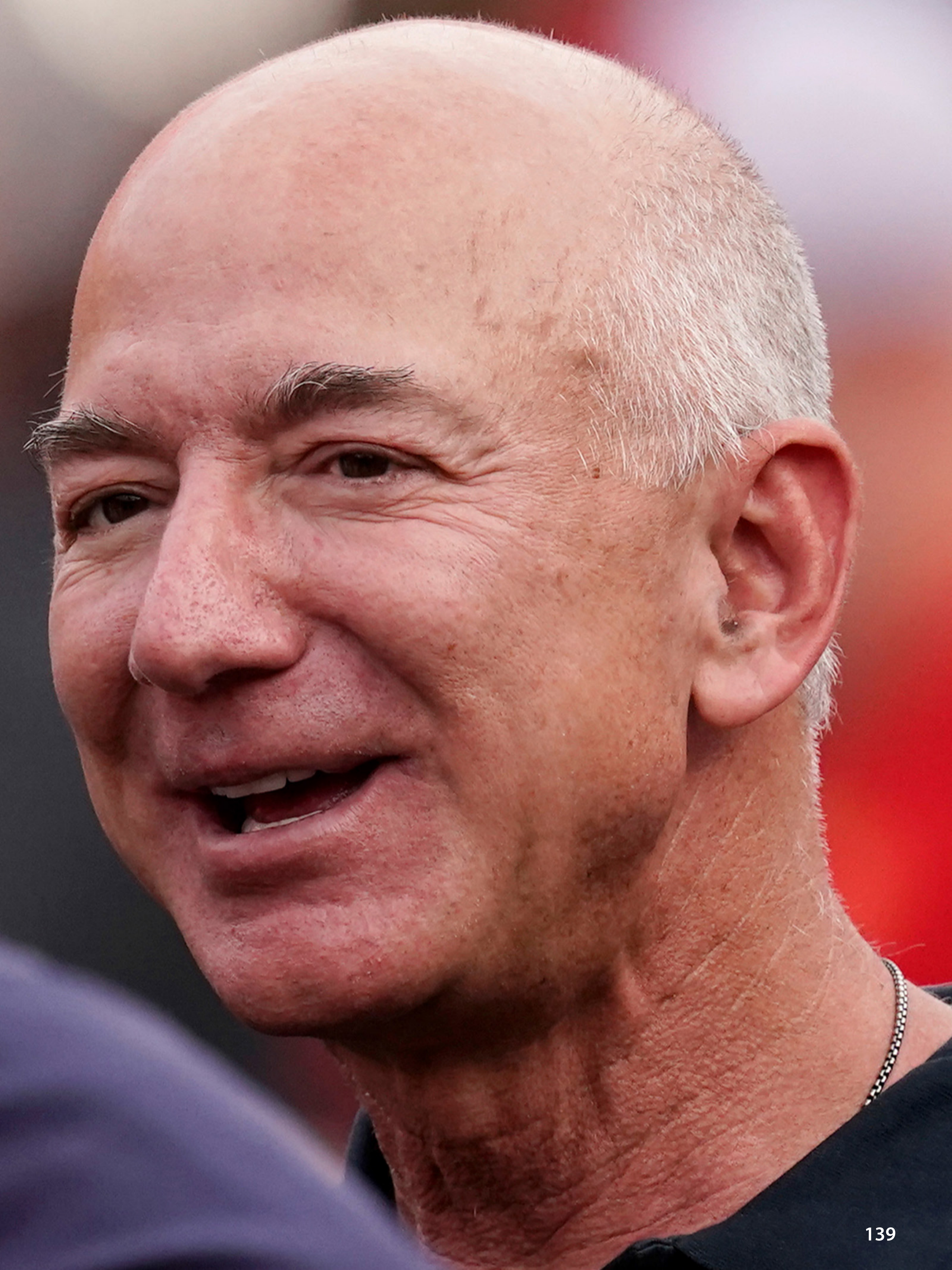
THE WORLD COULD GET ITS FIRST TRILLIONAIRE WITHIN 10 YEARS



The world could have its first trillionaire within a decade, anti-poverty organization Oxfam International said this week in its annual assessment of global inequalities timed to the gathering of political and business elites at the Swiss ski resort of Davos.

Oxfam, which for years has been trying to highlight the growing disparities between the super-rich and the bulk of the global population during the World Economic Forum's annual meeting, reckons the gap has been "supercharged" since the coronavirus pandemic.



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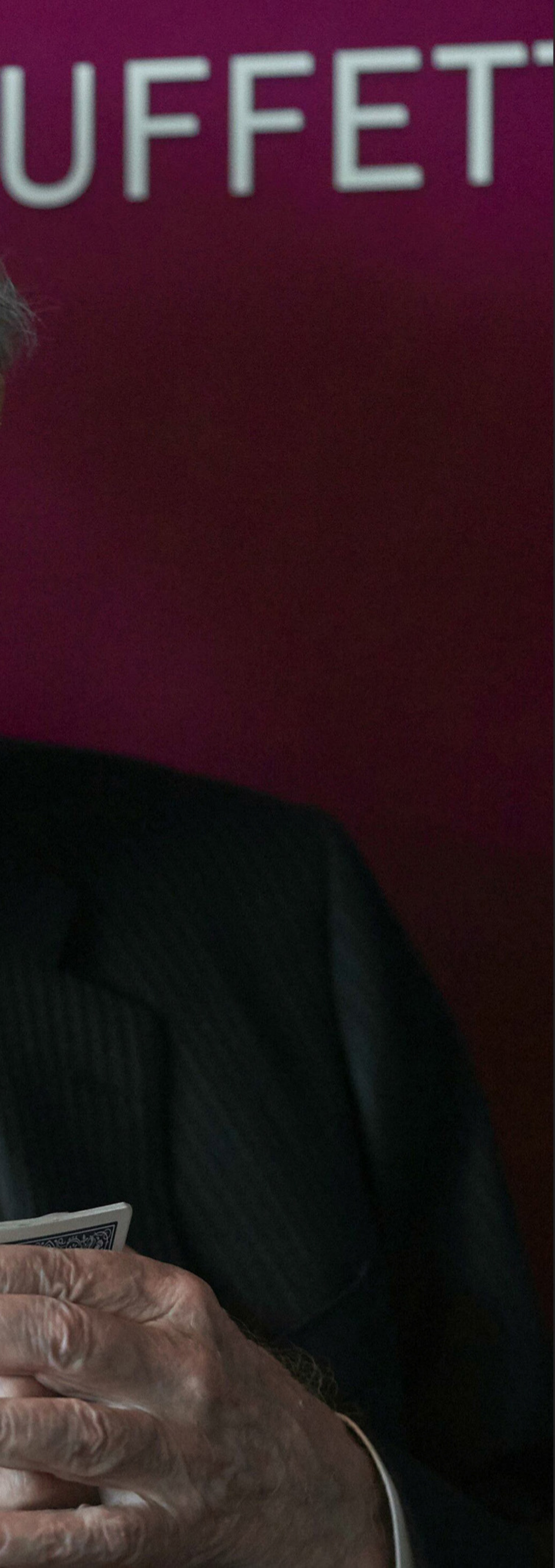


The group said the fortunes of the five richest men — Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Bernard Arnault and his family of luxury company LVMH, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Oracle founder Larry Ellison and investment guru Warren Buffett — have spiked by 114% in real terms since 2020, when the world was reeling from the pandemic.

Oxfam's interim executive director said the report showed that the world is entering a "decade of division."

"We have the top five billionaires, they have doubled their wealth. On the other hand, almost 5 billion people have become poorer," Amitabh Behar said in an interview in Davos, Switzerland, where the forum's annual meeting takes place.

"Very soon, Oxfam predicts that we will have a trillionaire within a decade," Behar said, referring to a person who has a thousand billion dollars. "Whereas to fight poverty, we need more than 200 years."

If someone does reach that trillion-dollar milestone — and it could be someone not even on any list of richest people right now — he or she would have the same value as oil-rich Saudi Arabia.

John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil fame is widely considered to have become the world's first billionaire in 1916.

Currently, Musk is the richest man on the planet, with a personal fortune of just under $250 billion, according to Oxfam, which used figures from Forbes.

By contrast, the organization said nearly 5 billion people have been made poorer since the pandemic, with many of the world's developing nations unable to provide the financial support that richer nations could during lockdowns.

In addition, Oxfam said Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which sent energy and food costs soaring, disproportionately hit the poorest nations.

With Brazil hosting this year's Group of 20 summit of leading industrial and developing nations, it was a "good time for Oxfam to raise awareness" about inequalities, said Max Lawson, Oxfam's head of inequality policy.

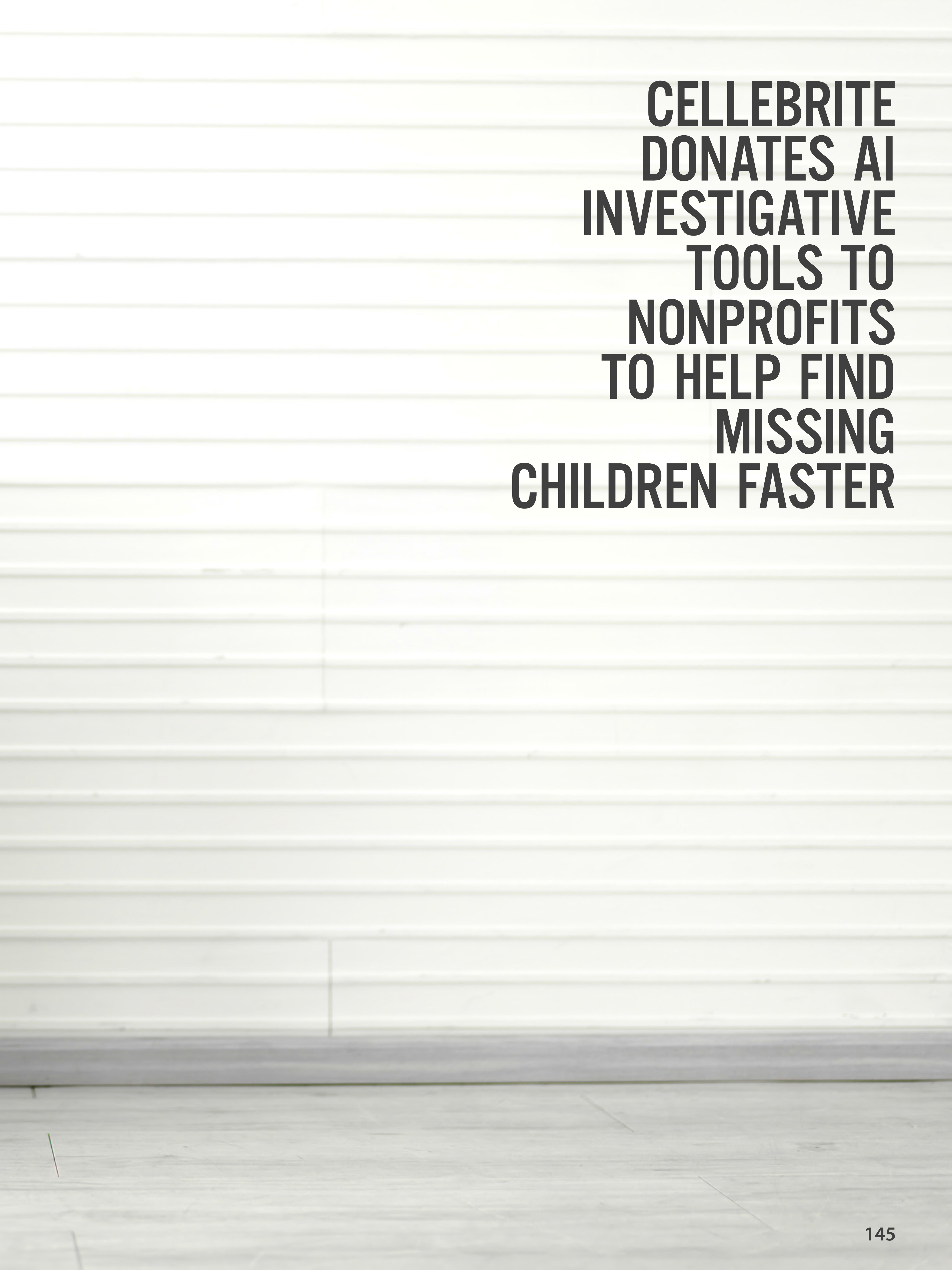
Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has put issues that concern the developing world at the heart of the G20 agenda.

Oxfam said measures that should be considered in an "inequality-busting" agenda include the permanent taxation of the wealthiest in every country, more effective taxation of big corporations and a renewed drive against tax avoidance.

To calculate the top five richest billionaires, Oxfam used figures from Forbes as of November 2023. Their total wealth then was $869 billion, up from $340 billion in March 2020, a nominal increase of 155%.

For the bottom 60% of the global population, Oxfam used figures from the UBS Global Wealth Report 2023 and from the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Databook 2019. Both used the same methodology.

CELLEBRITE DONATES AI INVESTIGATIVE TOOLS TO NONPROFITS TO HELP FIND MISSING CHILDREN FASTER



John Walsh, advocate for missing children and longtime host of "America's Most Wanted," said he feels outmanned by criminals all the time – especially in the courtroom.

"I say to myself, 'My god, the lawyer for this dirtbag predator is smarter and more sophisticated than the cops are," the co-founder of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. "They don't really know the technology."

Human traffickers and sexual predators often use high-end technology and increasingly take advantage of encryption to protect the details of their crimes, Walsh said. And even if they didn't, law enforcement officials, especially in smaller cities and towns, lack the budget and the access to the technological tools that would speed up the investigation and aid in the prosecution of the offenders.

Cellebrite DI, Ltd., wants to change that. The provider of digital tools that help law enforcement and private firms find and follow investigative leads last week launched "Operation Find Them All" – an initiative where the firm will donate its technology to nonprofits that help find endangered children, including the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the nonprofit The Exodus Road, which fights human trafficking around the world. The NASDAQ-traded company — which reported revenue of $85 million for the third quarter of 2023, up 17% year over year — will also make a financial donation to those organizations, as well as Raven, a political nonprofit that raises awareness of the threat of child exploitation online.

Yossi Carmil, Cellebrite's CEO, said the FBI had nearly 360,000 cases of missing children in 2022,

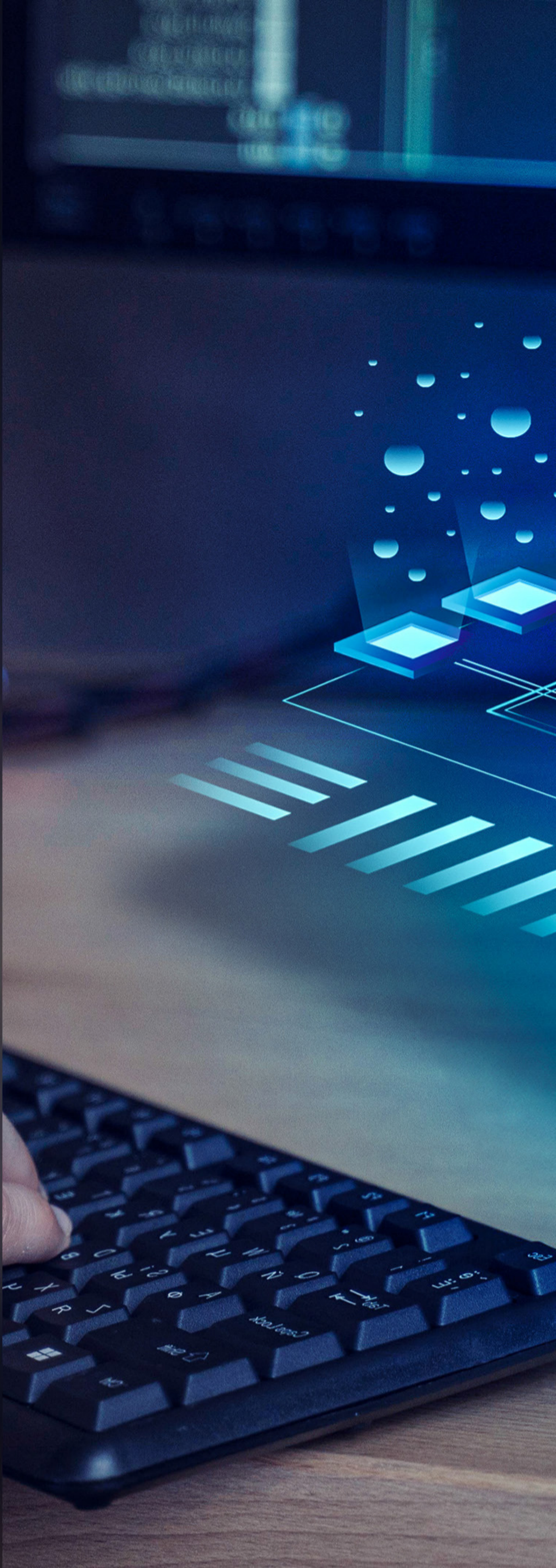
while the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children received more than 32 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation that year. Knowing that his company had the technology that could help children in trouble, Carmil said he felt Cellebrite had to do what it could.

"We are the biggest admirers of law enforcement," Carmil said. "However, they are understaffed, underequipped, and, at any point of time, regardless of how much the government will give them, they are under constraints. They always need to do more with less."

Kent Nielsen, digital forensic investigator for the Brazoria County Sheriff's Office in Texas, said his department currently uses Cellebrite technology to process data gathered from cell phones as well as its AI-driven software to analyze the data to find potential leads.

"The system really helps us with doing our jobs faster," said Nielsen, adding that one smartphone could contain more than 250,000 images to process. Rather than having an investigator look through those images and sort them, Cellebrite's Pathfinder software can handle it, while also linking them to locations, as well as other data from other smartphones or other cases.

The Brazoria County Sheriff's Office used the Cellebrite technology as part of the multi-agency Operation Interception to help rescue children being trafficked, as many visited the area due to the College Football Playoff national championship held in nearby Houston. Nielsen said seven girls were rescued and 23 arrests were made.



Matt Parker, co-founder of The Exodus Road, said he saw what a difference one piece of Cellebrite technology made in investigating the human trafficking of Rohingya Muslims in Malaysia in 2015. Through "Operation Find Them All," Parker hopes to bring Cellebrite technology to other countries, even if the governments have previously not prosecuted human trafficking cases.

"When you fight corruption globally, you have to have an overwhelming amount of evidence that is difficult to sweep under the rug," Parker said. "You have to make the case a slam dunk and I'm telling you, in all the experience I have had over the last 13 years... in hundreds of cases of human trafficking, when we leverage Cellebrite technology and we introduce that technology into the judicial process, the success level is significantly higher."

Walsh said he hopes that the increased access to technology can help level the playing field against those preying on children.

He said the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children employs about 450 at its Virginia headquarters and has five other branches around the country. In 2022, it received more than 110,000 calls about missing children – an increase of 16% from the previous year.

"We should have 2,000 people working on those calls," Walsh said. "We should have 100 branches across the United States."

Experts say that not only are there now more human traffickers, but they are also technologically savvier.

HOME
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CELLEBRITE ACCELERATED
Matt Parker
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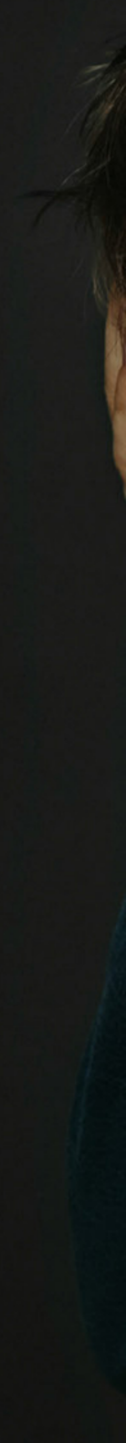


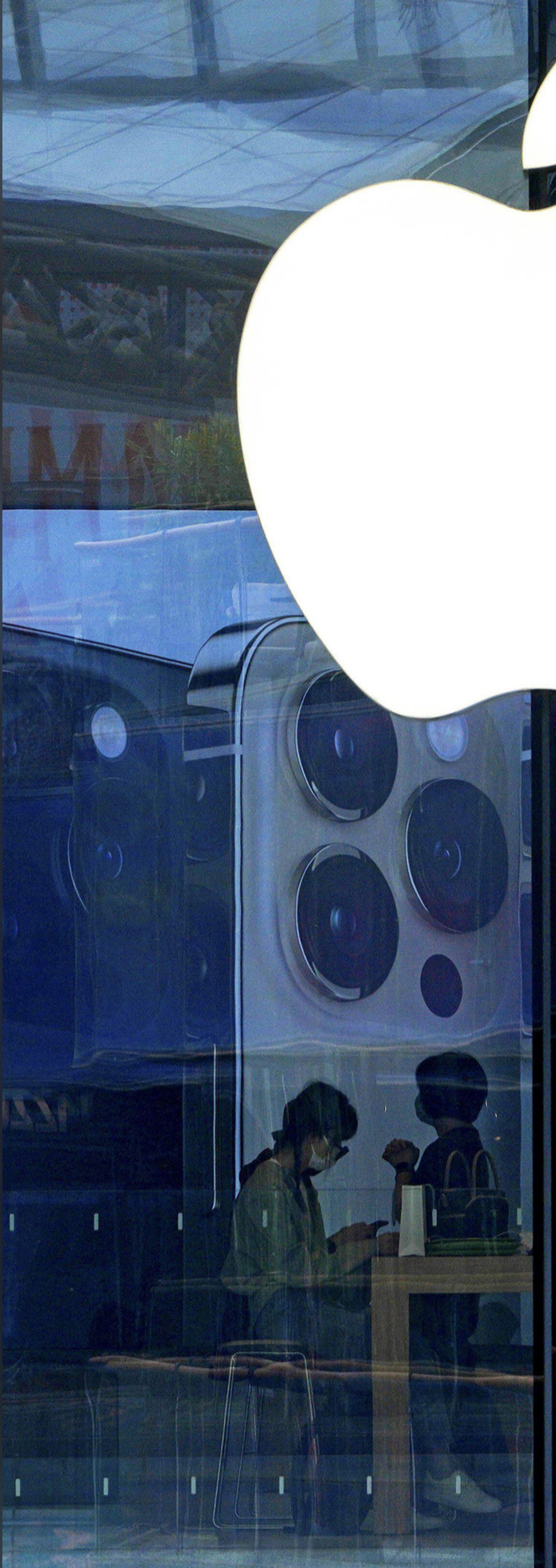
“The pimps of the day, the gangs of today are way smarter than the sex trafficking gangs of the past,” Walsh said. “They’re way more dangerous. They move faster. They have encrypted files. They’re smart. And law enforcement just can’t keep up with them.”

Cellebrite’s Carmil said government has the responsibility of funding law enforcement so that they can better protect children and quickly search for those that are missing.

However, he said corporations and nonprofits need to do what they can as well.

“I’ve got kids. John (Walsh) has kids. We are also citizens and parents,” Carmil said. “This is a holy mission. It goes beyond the money.”

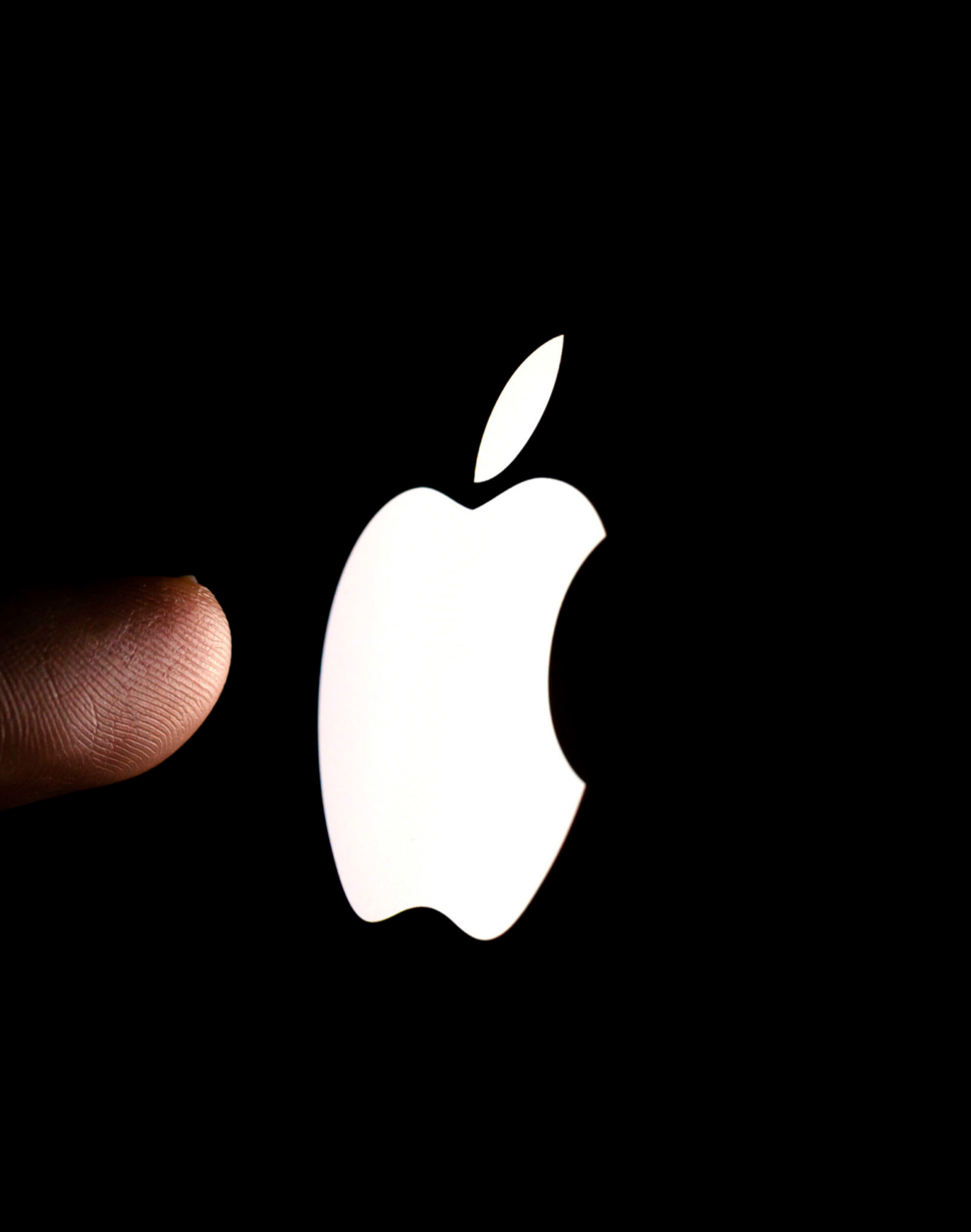
THE SUPREME COURT ALLOWS A COURT ORDER TO TAKE EFFECT THAT COULD COST APPLE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS



The Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed a court order to take effect that could loosen Apple's grip on its lucrative iPhone app store, and potentially affect billions of dollars in revenue a year.

The justices rejected Apple's appeal of lower-court rulings that found some of Apple's app store rules for apps purchased on more than 1 billion iPhones constitute unfair competition under California law.

The appeal stemmed from an antitrust lawsuit



filed by Epic Games, maker of the popular Fortnite video game. Epic lost its broader claim that Cupertino, California-based Apple was violating federal antitrust law, and the justices also rejected Epic's appeal Tuesday.

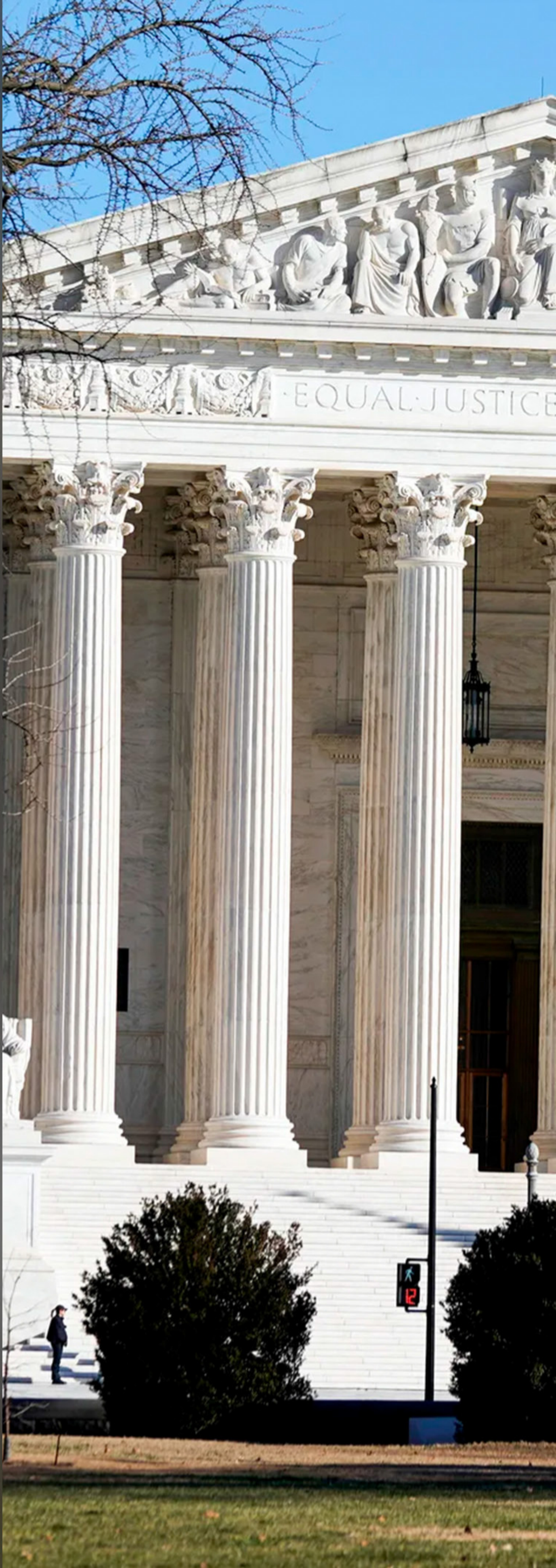
But in turning away Apple's plea, the court lifted a hold on an order to allow app developers throughout the U.S. to insert links to other payment options besides its own within iPhone apps. That change would make it easier for developers to avoid paying Apple's commissions.

Epic, based in Cary, North Carolina, had claimed that Apple's app store — which was launched in 2008, a year after the first iPhone went on sale — had turned into an illegal monopoly that stifles innovation and competition while generating billions of dollars in profit for Apple.

Epic tried to offer an alternative way to get its mobile app, attempting to evade the developer fees inside the app store, which collects a commission of 15% to 30% on subscriptions and other digital transactions.

Apple ousted Epic from its app store after it tried to get around restrictions that Apple says protect the security and privacy of iPhone users while also helping to recoup some of the investment that powers one of the world's most ubiquitous devices.

Last month, Epic won a jury trial against Google and its Play Store for apps on Android phones in a lawsuit mirroring its action against Apple. A federal judge still must determine what changes Google will have to make to its Play Store.



UNDER·LAW

UBER CUTS OFF DRIZLY, THE ALCOHOL DELIVERY APP IT BOUGHT FOR $1.1 BILLION THREE YEARS AGO

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Uber is shutting down alcohol delivery app Drizly, the company confirmed, three years after acquiring the platform for $1.1 billion.

Drizly will officially shut down at the end of March, Uber told. That means orders are open until then, Drizly said in details posted on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter.

“We’ll be sure to let you know when it’s last call,” Drizly wrote in a post this week.

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In a prepared statement, Uber's senior vice president of delivery Pierre Dimitri Gore-Coty said that the company decided to close Drizly's business and "focus on our core Uber Eats strategy of helping consumers get almost anything — from food to groceries to alcohol — all on a single app."

Uber purchased Drizly in a cash-and-stock deal back in 2021. The Boston-based subsidiary continued to operate as a standalone app, with its marketplace also integrated into the Uber Eats platform.

Drizly currently delivers beer, wine and spirits in states where it's legal, and partners with retailers across North America.

Regulators accused the alcohol delivery app of security failures several years ago that exposed personal information of some 2.5 million customers. To resolve these allegations, Drizly later agreed to tighten security and limit data collection.

Axios first reported on Uber's decision to shutter Drizly.

In a Tuesday email, Uber said it plans to learn from Drizly's time in the industry as the company continues to grow its own "BevAlc" offerings, which are currently available in 35 U.S. states and 25 countries worldwide. The San Francisco company added that the majority of current Drizly customers also have Uber accounts.

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Image: Markus Schreiber

MORE CEOS FEAR THEIR COMPANIES WON'T SURVIVE 10 YEARS AS AI AND CLIMATE CHALLENGES GROW, SURVEY SAYS

More executives are feeling better about the global economy, but a growing number don't think their companies will survive the coming decade without a major overhaul because of pressure from climate change and technology like artificial intelligence, according to a new survey of CEOs by one of the world's largest consulting firms, PwC.

The survey of more than 4,700 CEOs worldwide was released this week as business elites, political leaders and activists descended on the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, and it showed a mixed picture of the coming years.

Of the executives, 38% were optimistic about the strength of the economy, up from 18% last year, when the world was mired in high inflation, weak growth, rising interest rates and more.

The CEOs' expectation of economic decline has dropped to 45% from a record-high 73% last year, and fewer saw their company as highly exposed to the risk of geopolitical conflict, according to the PwC Global CEO Survey. That's despite wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, including disruptions to global trade from attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on commercial ships in the Red Sea.

Even with the improved economic outlook, the challenge isn't close to over, with the World Bank saying last week that it expects the global economy would slow for a third consecutive year in 2024.

The executives, meanwhile, felt worse about the prospects for their companies' ability to weather big changes. The survey shows 45% of the respondents were worried that their businesses

AI

wouldn't be viable in a decade without reinvention, up from 39% last year.

The CEOs say they're trying to make changes, but they are running up against regulation, a lack of skills among workers and more.

"Whether it is accelerating the rollout of generative AI or building their business to address the challenges and opportunities of the climate transition, this is a year of transformation," Bob Moritz, global chairman of PwC, formerly known as PricewaterhouseCoopers, said in a statement.

Artificial intelligence was seen as both a way to streamline business operations and a weakness. Nearly three-quarters of the executives said "it will significantly change the way their company creates, delivers and captures value in the next three years," PwC said.

More than half the CEOs said AI will make their products or services better, but 69% noted that their workers needed training to gain skills to use the developing technology. They also were concerned about how AI would increase cybersecurity risks and misinformation.

Organizers of the Davos gathering warned last week that the threat posed by AI-powered misinformation, such as the creation of synthetic content, is the world's greatest short-term threat.

Another worldwide survey released around Davos, the Edelman Trust Barometer by public relations firm Edelman, says innovation is being managed badly and is increasing polarization, especially in Western democracies, where people with right-leaning beliefs are much more likely than those on the left to resist innovation.

"Innovation is only accepted if there is a sense that we're looking at the big picture of how we take care of the people whose jobs are going to change, how scientists are going to talk to the people directly so they understand it," CEO Richard Edelman told. "And finally, that one way in another, AI is affordable and makes it easier for people to live."

The online survey — which again showed that business is the most trusted institution among government, media, science and nongovernmental organizations — gathered responses from more than 32,000 respondents in 28 countries from Nov. 3 to Nov. 22.

Similar to AI, the PwC survey shows that the climate transition is both an opportunity and a risk. An increasing number of CEOs — nearly a third — say climate change was expected to shift how they do things over the next three years.

More than three-quarters of the executives said they have begun or completed changes to increase energy efficiency, but only 45% noted that they have made progress on taking the climate risks into account in financial planning.

The PwC survey of 4,702 CEOs in 105 countries and territories was conducted from Oct. 2 to Nov. 10.

STILL TRYING TO MAKE 'FETCH' HAPPEN, NOW IN SONG: 'MEAN GIRLS' GETS A MUSICAL UPDATE

REVIEW

The first "Mean Girls," that compulsively watchable high-school based social satire by Tina Fey, came out in 2004. The Broadway musical opened in 2018. Now it's 2024, and we have a screen adaptation of the theater adaptation. How long will this reconfiguring go on? Is there a limit?

Or ... does the limit not exist?

Forgive us that utterly blatant setup for one of the original's most famous lines. It's just that some of them are so darned memorable. Like, "You can't sit with us!" — screeched. Or when Regina, the haughtiest queen bee ever to carry a cafeteria tray, scathingly tells her minion Gretchen, who's trying out her new word "fetch," to "Stop trying to make 'fetch' happen. It's NOT going to happen!!"

But even in "Mean Girls 17," should it come to that, someone will still be trying to make "fetch" happen. And it's actually not a bad word to describe the experience of watching the new "Mean Girls" — a slick, fizzy bit of entertainment that's occasionally delightful and usually fun, even if the translation to 2024 definitely has its rough spots.

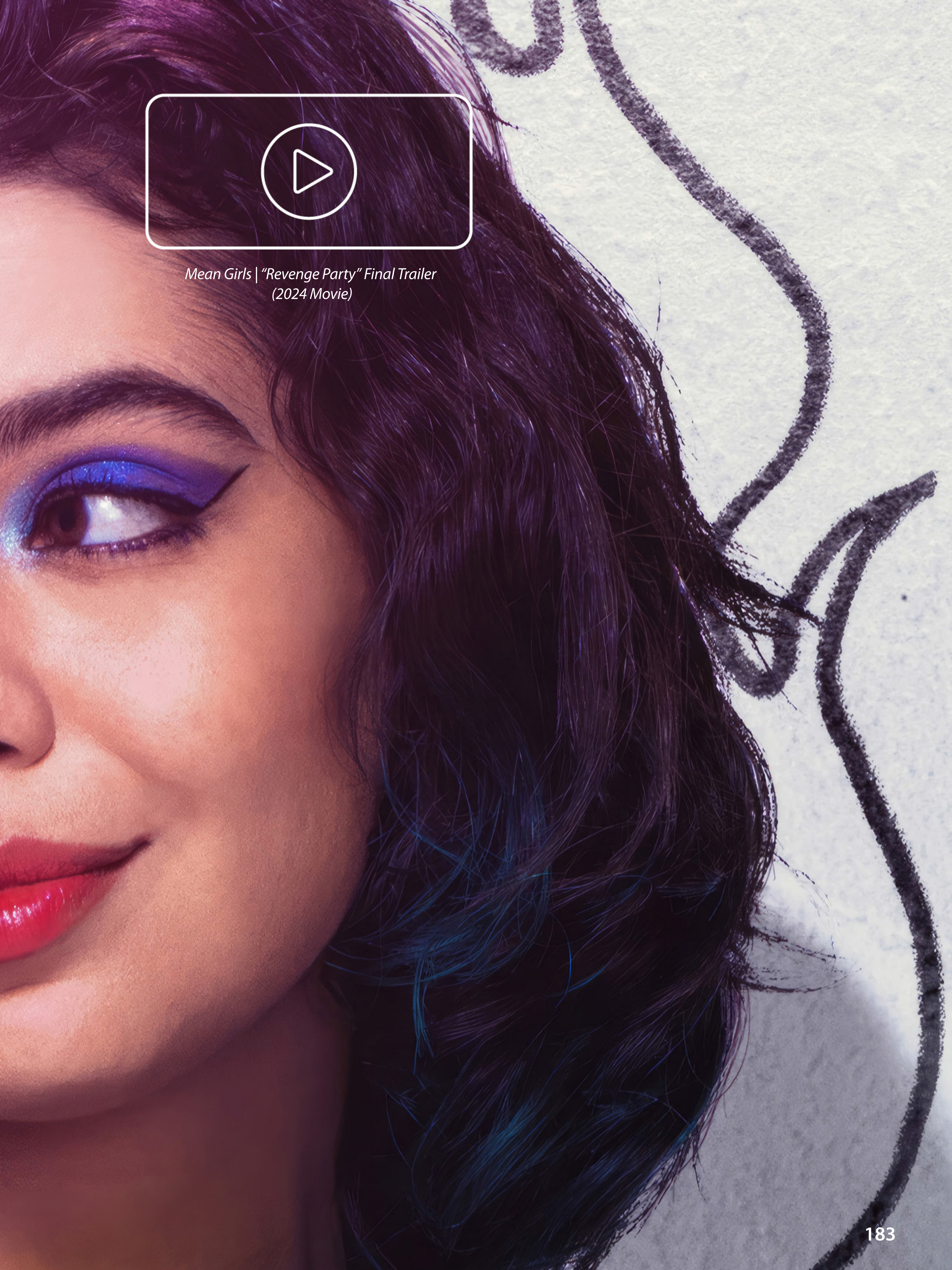
If you've recently re-watched the first film, you may be surprised here at how many lines remain, word for word. What's impressive is how many still work – unlike some social comedies that felt right 20 years ago but have scenes that fall with a thud now (see "Love Actually").

There are exceptions, though. I'll confess to feeling queasy throughout about the "dumb girl" character who remains in the Plastics, Regina's social group. There is, thankfully, no more reference to a coach sleeping with a student, which would not have been funny, even with Jon Hamm as the coach. Slut-shaming has been

ADULTS ON BOARD

You Can't Scare Me.
LOWER LIMB PROSTHETICS
Coach Carr
COACH

Mean Girls | Official Trailer (2024 Movie)



Mean Girls | "Revenge Party" Final Trailer (2024 Movie)

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conspicuously toned down – the insult in Regina's famous Burn Book is now "cow" and not "slut."

On the other hand, fat-shaming? That's still there, as when the camera zooms in rudely on the rear end of a character who's gained a few pounds.

As for the casting, some of it works wonderfully, particularly the duo who introduce the film, which is again written by Fey, with music by Jeff Richmond (her husband), and lyrics by Nell Benjamin. Damian, the beloved character described affectionately by Janis as "almost too gay to function" (but that's only OK when she says it), and Janis, his best friend, a talented artist whose fallout with Regina left her in the dirt socially, function almost as quasi-narrators. Jaquel Spivey, of Broadway's "A Strange Loop," is hilarious and also moving as Damian — you wait for each new line, and he wastes none of them. And Auli'i Cravalho as Janis has a gorgeous voice and charismatic screen presence. (And a huge song, though from the trailer, you wouldn't know anyone has songs at all.)

Angourie Rice is the new Cady, the Lindsay Lohan role, a home-schooled math whiz who arrives in suburban Chicago straight from Kenya, where her mother was doing zoological research, into the snake pit of high school. Rice is a sweet presence but not as convincing in the "bad Cady" moments as Lohan. As for the Plastics, singer Reneé Rapp, formerly Regina on Broadway, imbues the role with powerhouse vocals and an angrier edge than the excellent Rachel McAdams did — when she's enraged, boy, you feel it.

Once again, Cady begins her first school day in math class with Ms. Norbury, once played by Fey — and again by Fey! Tim Meadows is also back as

Mean Girls | Regina’s Version (2024 Movie)

Mean Girls | Plastic is Forever Featurette (2024 Movie) the principal; both look older but certainly not two decades.

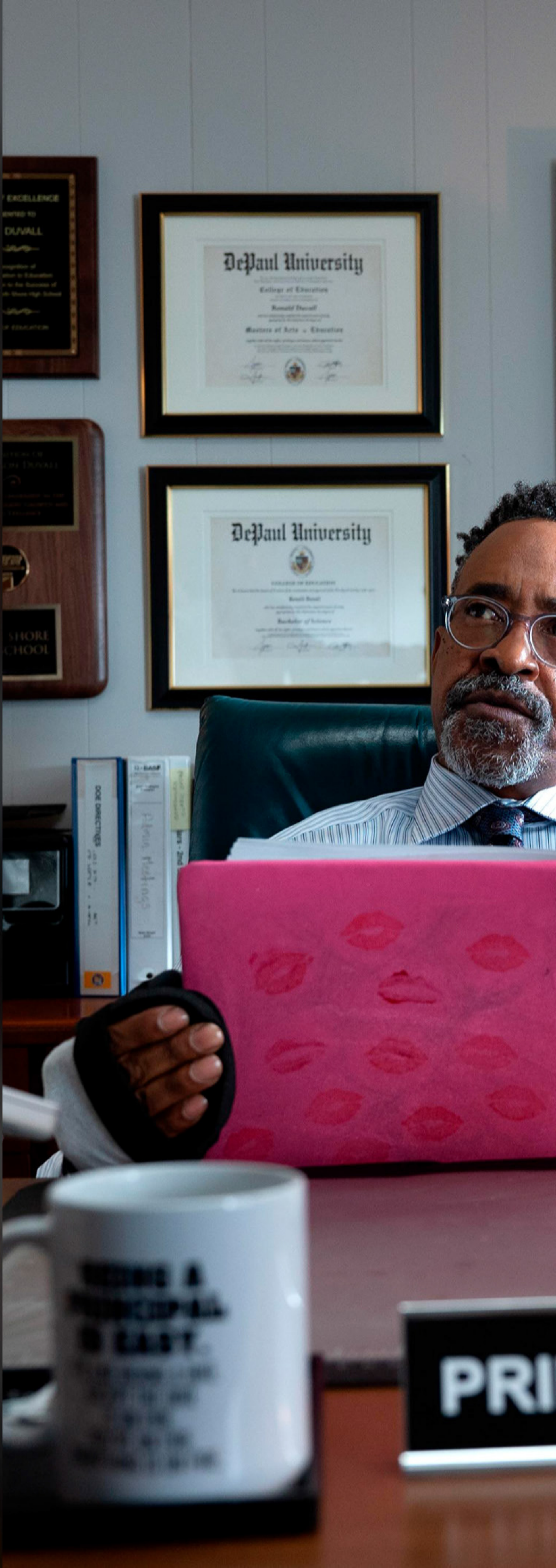
Cady has a rough entry and ends up eating lunch in a bathroom stall, but is rescued by Janis and Damian. In the cafeteria, she has her first encounter with Queen Bee Regina. “My name is Regina George,” sings Rapp, in some of the show’s best lyrics, “I am a massive deal. I don’t care who you are, I don’t care how you feel.”

The Plastics — Regina, needy Gretchen (Bebe Woods) and intellectually challenged Karen (Avantika) — adopt Cady and teach her the rules: Wear pink on Wednesdays. No tank tops two days in a row. A ponytail? Once a week. Also: You can’t date someone’s ex-boyfriend, because those are “the rules of feminism.” At such moments, one can literally hear Fey writing the line. (Side note: Please come back to the Golden Globes, Tina, and bring Amy Poehler.) (Speaking of Poehler, she is missed as Regina’s “cool” mom, but aptly replaced by Busy Philipps.)

Things go south quickly when Cady falls for Regina’s ex, Aaron, who sits in front of her in AP Calculus (leading to the excellent lyric “Calcu-lust.”) Regina isn’t going to give up Aaron without a dirty fight. So Cady, aided by Damian and Janis, plots to bring Regina down from inside, pretending to be a loyal Plastic.

But at what point does Cady stop pretending and BECOME a Plastic? (Ask Janis.)

Directors Samantha Jayne and Arturo Perez Jr. keep the action moving briskly. A key visual difference is technology. In the 2004 film, friends spoke to each other on the telephone, in split screens. Now, of course, gossip and bullying take place via social media. In some ways this makes



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NCIPAL RON DUVALL

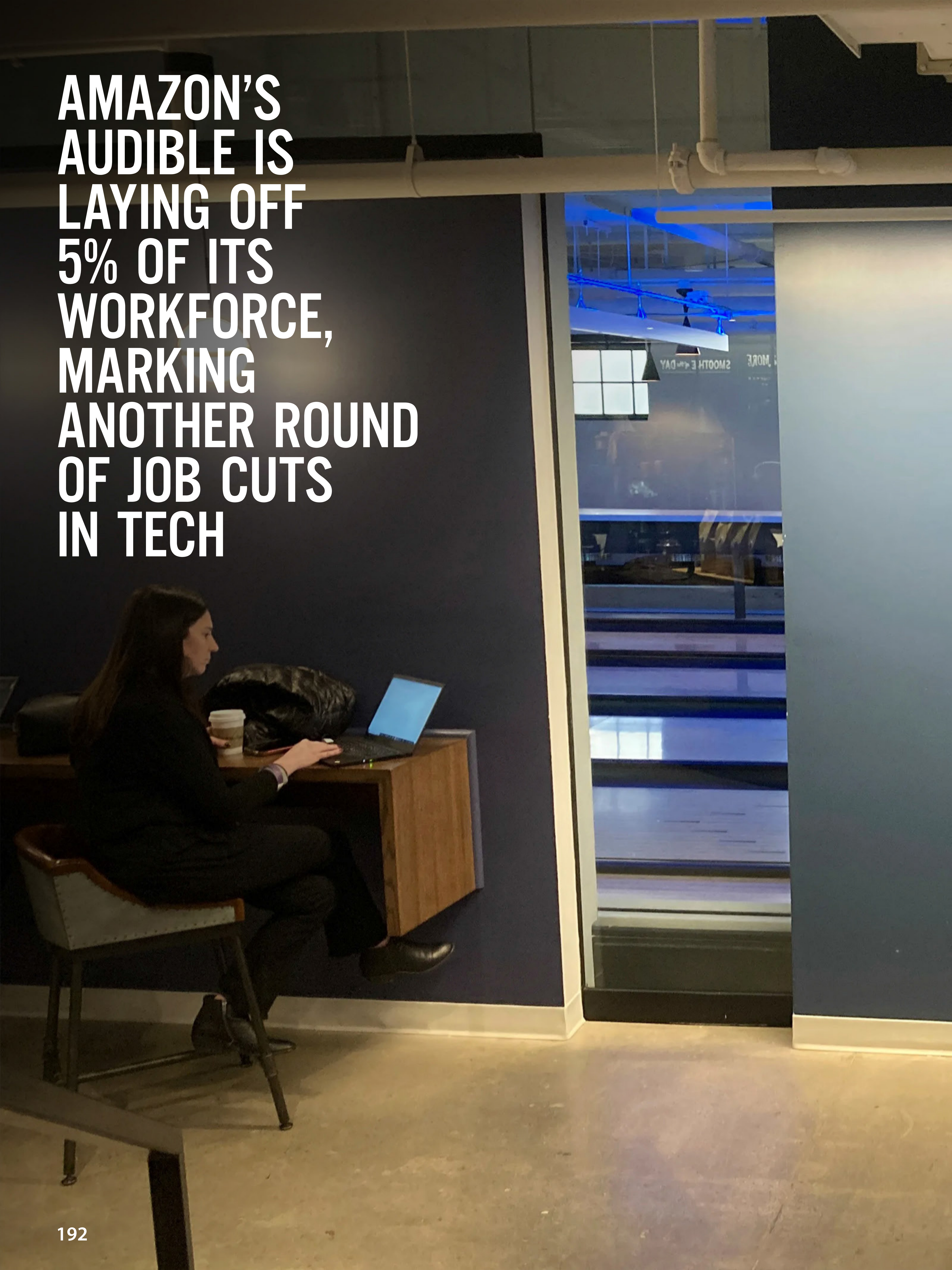
Mean Girls | Choreography Featurette (2024 Movie)

it all seem more vicious. When Regina takes an embarrassing tumble onstage at the Christmas performance, we witness a social media shaming that is much crueler than anything that happened in the 2004 version.

And yet, it's believable, of course. One comes away from this latest "Mean Girls" thinking that in some ways things may have gotten better for high schoolers than they were in 2004 — but in other ways, things have only gotten meaner.

"Mean Girls," a Paramount Pictures release, has been rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association "for sexual material, strong language, and teen drinking. " Running time: 105 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

AMAZON'S AUDIBLE IS LAYING OFF 5% OF ITS WORKFORCE, MARKING ANOTHER ROUND OF JOB CUTS IN TECH



audible

Amazon-owned online audiobook and podcast service Audible is laying off about 5% of its workforce, marking the third round of job cuts at the e-commerce giant's businesses last week as the technology industry continues to shed roles in the new year.

In a memo sent to employees, Audible CEO Bob Carrigan said the company is in good shape, but faces an "increasingly challenging landscape."

"We did not take this route without considerable thought," Carrigan said. "But getting leaner and more efficient is the way we will need to operate now — and in the foreseeable future — in order to continue delivering best-in-class audio storytelling to our customers around the world."

A spokesperson for Audible declined to provide the number of employees who will be affected by the cuts.

The layoffs at Audible follow others announced this week in Amazon's Prime Video and MGM Studios unit, which is trimming hundreds of employees from its payroll as it cuts back in areas that are not delivering. Earlier this week, Amazon-owned streaming platform Twitch also said it was cutting more than 500 jobs in a bid to save on costs and become more profitable.

Audible was purchased by Seattle-based Amazon in 2008 for roughly $300 million and is both a top distributor and producer of audio books, meditation programs and podcasts. The service is dominant in the audiobook market and has sought to pull in more customers through exclusive content and high-profile deals, including a multiyear agreement it inked with Higher Ground Productions, a production

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company founded by former President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle.

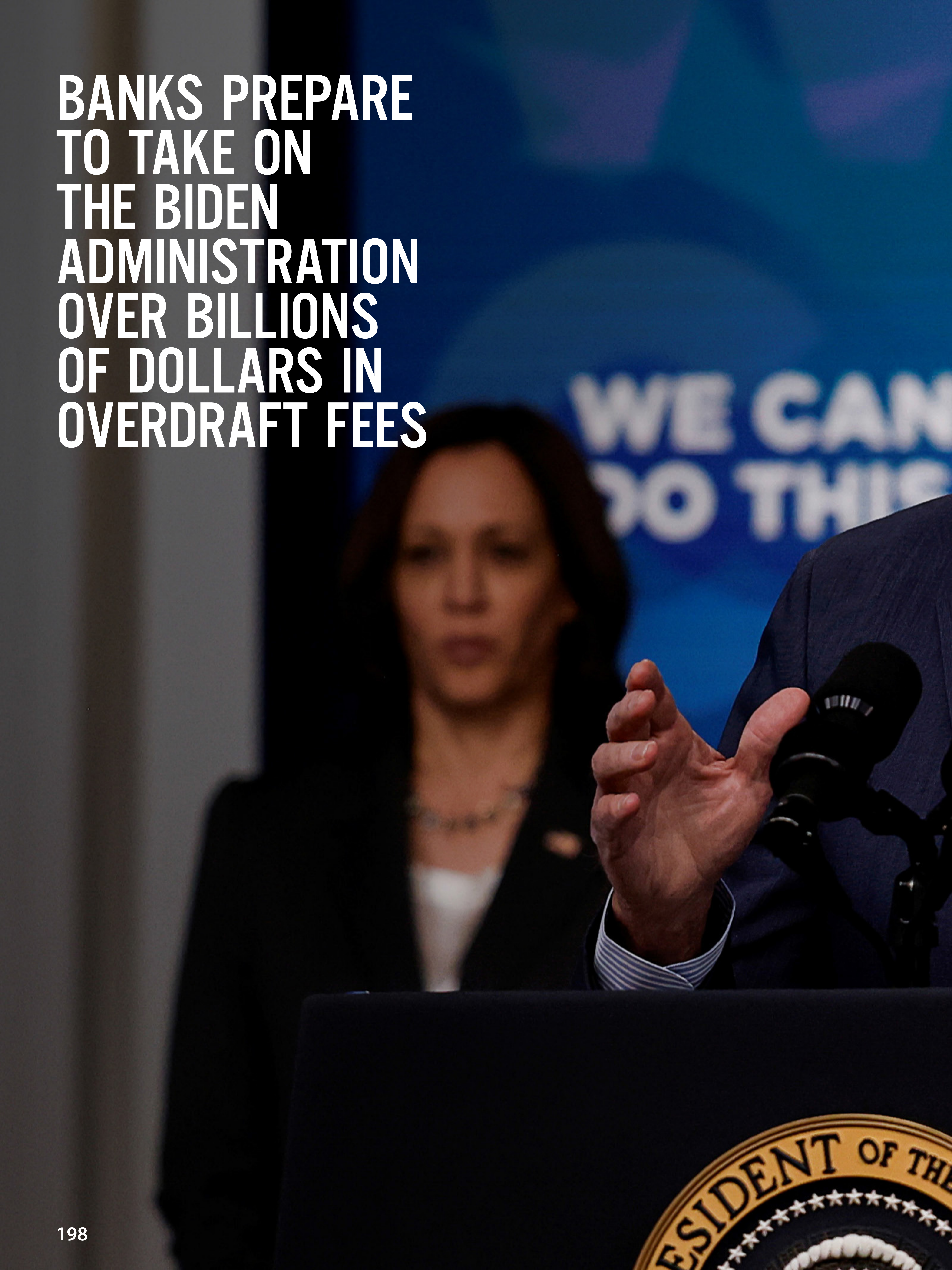
Tech companies like Amazon ramped up hiring during the pandemic, but they began cutting costs as inflation and interest rates spiked and their focus turned to profitability.

The recent job cuts follows mass layoffs that began at Amazon in late 2022 and have impacted more than 27,000 employees.

Also, a spokesperson for Discord confirmed that the social media company is laying off 17% of its staff – or 170 employees – in what it characterized as a move to bring more agility to its workforce after a pandemic-induced surge in hiring.

Other tech companies — including Google, IT company Xerox and video game software provider Unity Software — have also announced layoffs in recent days, signaling the industry's job shedding is far from over.

BANKS PREPARE TO TAKE ON THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION OVER BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN OVERDRAFT FEES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The squabble over billion of dollars in overdraft fees that Americans get charged every year is intensifying.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is expected to propose rules this week that further rein in banks' ability to charge customers a fee when they overdraw their bank account. Opponents of the fees often cite the example of a $3 cup of coffee costing someone $40.

The banking industry is gearing up to fight back with a multimillion-dollar marketing and lobbying campaign. While banks have drastically cut back on overdraft fees in the past decade, the nation's biggest banks still take in roughly $8 billion in overdraft fees every year, according to data from the CFPB and bank public records.

The Biden Administration has placed overdraft fees at the center of a campaign against what it calls "junk fees" and has directed government regulators — the CFPB and the Federal Trade Commission — to do whatever is in their power to further curtail the practice.

"It's just taking advantage of people," President Joe Biden said in October.

Banks charge a customer an overdraft fee if their bank account balance falls below zero. What started off as a courtesy offered to some customers, the popularity of debit cards beginning in the 1990s led to Americans wracking up tens of billions of dollars in overdraft fees.

Caving to popular and political pressure, most of the biggest banks have added safeguards to customers' accounts to allow them to bring the balance back into positive territory before they incur a fee, which at some banks can be as high as $39. Bank of America, once considered by industry critics to be the biggest abuser of overdraft fees, cut its fee from $35 to $10 two years ago and says revenue from overdraft fees is now less than 10% of what it had been.

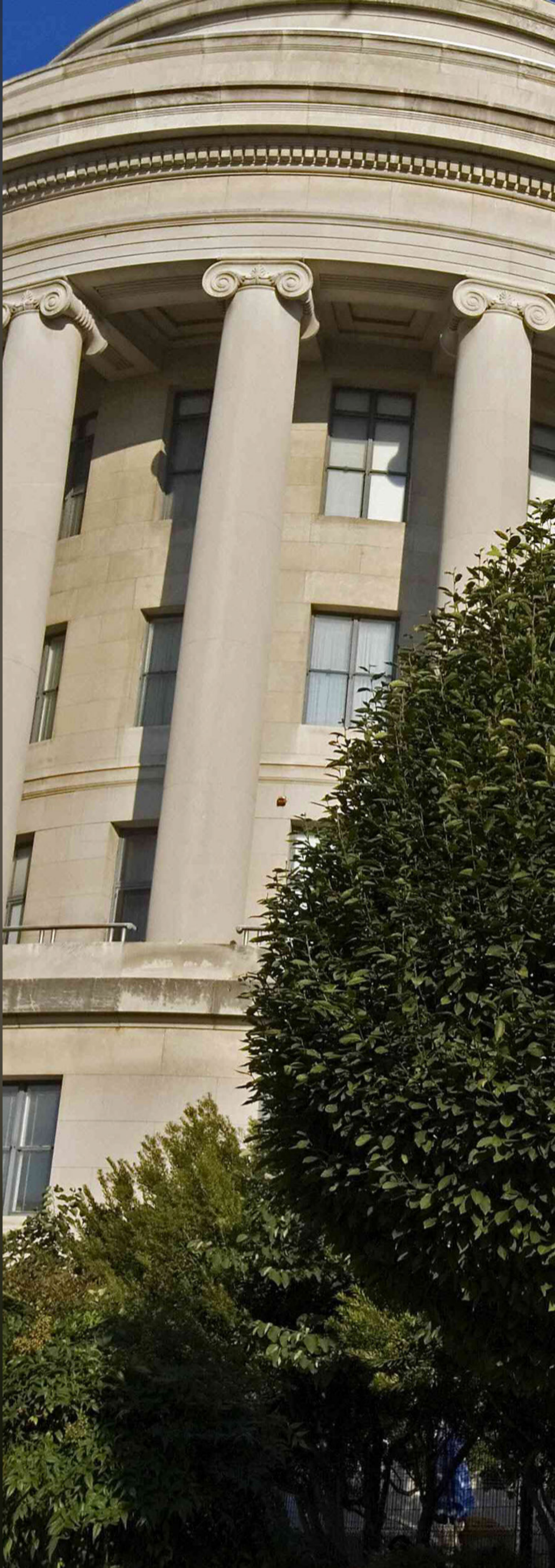
The largest banks have also curtailed their collection of fees for non-sufficient funds. In that case, the bank charges a customer a fee for not having the funds to cover a charge but also denies the transaction. These are commonly known as "bounced check fees."

According to Bankrate research conducted in August 2023, overdraft fees are still charged on 91% of accounts surveyed — and they can run as high as $39. The average overdraft fee in 2023 was $26.61.

Banking industry sources and consumer advocates both expect the CPFB's regulations to be focused on when overdrafts can be charged on a customer's account and how much banks can charge relative to the amount of risk a bank is taking on to cover a routine purchase. One criticism of overdraft fee practices is that the cost to a bank to cover routine purchases is low and banks have safeguards in place to stop customers from taking their accounts deep into red.

A report put out last month by the CFPB found that a quarter of households making less than $65,000 frequently get hit with overdraft fees, and that Black and Latino households are more likely to overdraft, meaning that the families least able to afford the fees are often the ones incurring the fees more frequently.

"That is increasingly difficult for banks to justify. Particularly at the level of fees that are



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being charged,” said Greg McBride, an analyst with Bankrate.

While big banks have cut back on overdraft fees, smaller banks have not, and a number of them heavily rely on overdrafts to be profitable, industry analysts said.

“There are still a large number of small banks and many credit unions that have not changed their credit policies, including a handful who have become addicted to overdraft,” said Aaron Klein, a senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution.

“”When you see an entity like Armed Forces Bank make all of their revenue off overdraft, off members who are enlisted military personnel overseas, you either want to scream or cry,” Klein said.

CFPB Director Rohit Chopra has been a fierce critic of overdraft fees, both in his current position and previously when he was at the Federal Trade Commission. The bureau has put out several reports in recent months highlighting bad industry practices regarding overdrafts, clearly signaling that it’s ready for a fight.

“(The bureau) has been focused on creating more competition, which is helping to eliminate junk fees and stop financial firms from cooking up new junk fees,” Chopra told journalists in October in prepared remarks.

The industry is unlikely to convince Chopra to hold off on the overdraft rules, and instead hopes to delay the bureau long enough to have any regulation overturned by a Republican

Congress and president after the 2024 election using the Congressional Review Act.

The law was used in the early months of the Trump Administration to overturn several policy wins of President Barack Obama late in his term, most notably regulations on high-cost payday loans.

“We urge you not to proceed with these rulemakings until the Bureau assesses the economic impact of its rulemakings on community banks and credit unions, as the Bureau is required to do so,” the American Bankers Association and other bank lobby groups wrote in a joint letter to the CFPB this month.

The banking lobby is also trying to be as vocal in their opposition as possible to prepare for an almost certain legal challenge to whatever rules the CFPB decides to implement. Any legal battle would have a high chance of ending up in front of the Supreme Court.

“The CFPB has done its homework here,” said Carter Dougherty, a spokesman for the left-leaning Americans for Financial Reform. “Some banks have gotten rid of overdrafts entirely and the world is still spinning on its axis. If bankers can’t run a business without relying on gotcha fees, they should find a new line of work.”

TECH FIRM BAIDU DENIES REPORT THAT ITS ERNIE AI CHATBOT IS LINKED TO CHINESE MILITARY RESEARCH

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Fears remain that 'dirty trade-offs' could torpedo ambitious post-2020 deal
Li Jing in Paris
jing.li@scmp.com
Negotiators at the Paris climate change summit scrambled to condense the text of a 43-page draft agreement to 29 pages on Wednesday afternoon, but key differences remained.
Observers and pressure groups say potential 'dirty trade-offs' between countries and key
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Broken homes
Tackling the thorny issue of responsibility for children caught up in divorce
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1, 2015 / See live updates at www.scmp.com / HK$9
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China accelerates talks on EU investment deal
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Technology company Baidu refuted a newspaper report that said its artificial intelligence chatbot Ernie was linked to Chinese military research.

Hong Kong newspaper South China Morning Post cited an academic paper from a university affiliated with the People's Liberation Army cyberwarfare division. The paper stated that the division had tested its artificial intelligence system on Baidu's Ernie and on artificial intelligence firm iFlyTek's Spark, both of which are language-based AI chatbots similar to ChatGPT.

After its Hong Kong-listed stock plunged more than 11.5% Monday, Baidu denied the allegations, saying in a statement that it had not engaged in a business collaboration with the paper's authors or their affiliated institutions.

"Ernie Bot is available to and used by the general public," the Chinese company said in its statement.

The academic paper from the PLA Information Engineering University detailed how researchers had given Ernie Bot prompts to generate simulated military response plans for Libyan troops in response to a U.S. military attack.

Baidu said that if the authors employed large language models such as Ernie Bot, they would have used the functions available to any user interacting with such AI tools.

Like ChatGPT, users can pose questions or requests to Ernie Bot, which would then generate content based on the initial prompt. Like many other internet services in China, Ernie Bot is also subject to censorship rules and will not answer questions deemed politically sensitive or taboo by the Chinese government.

The South China Morning Post report initially described a "physical link" between Ernie and the PLA division. The reference has since been amended to say that the PLA lab had tested its system on Baidu's AI model.

The plunge in Baidu's stock price underscored fears from investors that Chinese technology firms linked to the Chinese military or government could be sanctioned by the U.S. in a similar fashion to Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei, which the U.S. sees as an espionage risk.

Relations between China and the U.S. have declined in recent years over disagreements on trade, technology and issues related to Taiwan, a self-ruled island and U.S. ally that China regards as a renegade province to be taken by force if necessary.

Baidu, which operates China's leading search engine and is one of the country's leading artificial intelligence firms, made Ernie Bot available to the public in August 2023 amid a race among Chinese technology firms to produce China's ChatGPT equivalent.

The Beijing-headquartered firm said in December that it had more than 100 million users for Ernie Bot.

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